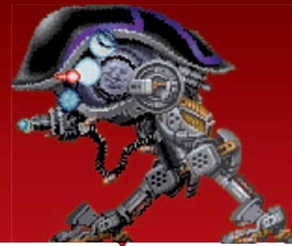
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HOW DEVELOPERS CONVERTED SNK'S CULT BLASTER TO THE CPC

THE MAKING OF...

BAD INFLUENCE

VIOLET BERLIN ON THE GAMES SHOW THAT HELPED START A REVOLUTION



IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

ATARI 5200

THE AMERICAN FOLLOW-UP TO THE 2600 THAT NEVER REACHED THE UK

LARRY DE MAR

WE SPEAK TO THE CO-DEVELOPER OF ROBOTRON AND DEFENDER

DYNAMIX

CO-FOUNDER JEFF TUNNELL LOOKS BACK AT 17 YEARS OF GREAT SIMS

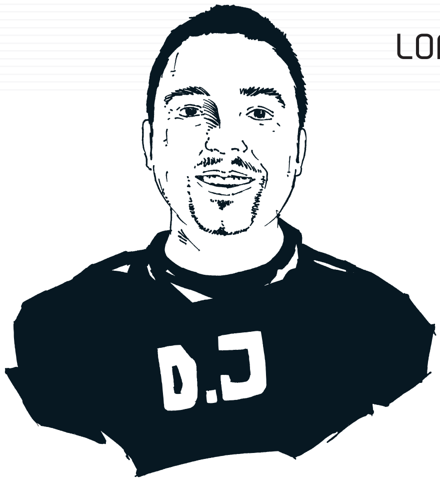
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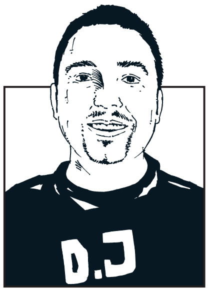
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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MOTORCYCLE VIDEOGAME?



DARRAN JONES

The sensible part of me says *3D Deathchase*, but I'm having so much fun playing the brilliant *Joe Danger* that I'm going to go with that instead.
Expertise:
Juggling a beautiful wife, two lovely girls and **Retro Gamer**
Currently playing:
Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon (GBA)
Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

Excitebike 64 is excellent, but the brilliant 3DO iteration of *Road Rash* gets my vote. EA really needs to return to the series.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Dragon Quest IX
Favourite game of all time:
Dragon Quest IX



JASON KELK

I've always been very fond of the C16 version of *Kikstart*, although *Kikstart 2* on the C64 comes a close second.
Expertise:
Parallax scrolling
Currently playing:
Danmaku Retro (PC)
Favourite game of all time:
Io



CRAIG GRANNELL

It's old, lacks realism and costs two quid, but *Kikstart 2* for the C64 remains my all-time favourite biking game. It's fun, addictive and the course builder is great.
Expertise:
Games you don't need 37 fingers to control
Currently playing:
Osmos (iPad)
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

3D Deathchase, because as kids we used to pretend to be the rider chasing friends through the woods. Good to see Dave Perry's plans for a remake.
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Red Dead Redemption
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



MARTYN CARROLL

I used to love *Motorcross Maniacs* on the Game Boy and *Kikstart 2* on the Spectrum, but the best bike game I've ever played is the jump-tastic *Trials HD* on Xbox 360.
Expertise:
Games you could POKE
Currently playing:
Limbo
Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



PAUL DAVIES

If I'm only allowed to choose one then it definitely has to be *Road Rash 2* on Mega Drive.
Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall
Currently playing:
Monster Hunter Tri
Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



RICHARD BURTON

Inspired by the light-bikes from *Tron*, the Spanish game *Zona 0* was a testing isometric variation on the theme. It was brick hard but very playable.
Expertise: Stuff and nonsense
Currently playing:
Splatterhouse
Favourite game of all time:
Manic Miner

LOADING...

I'm really excited about Retro Gamer at the moment. Well, to be honest, I'm always excited about the magazine, but it's a time for change and I absolutely love change – providing, of course, that it's not change simply for change's sake.

We're 80 issues young, and both Stuart and myself are absolutely bursting with ideas for the magazine that will be implemented over the coming months. We won't be radically changing the style or format or changing the mix of computer/console coverage that we already have – why fix something that isn't broken? – but you will see plenty of new features that will focus on different aspects of the hobby, from hardware to the games themselves.

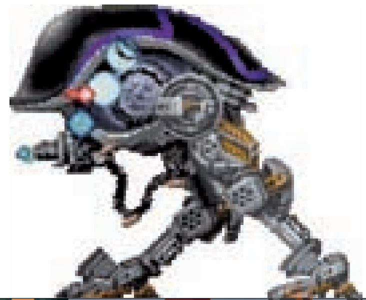
We've already kicked things off with The Ultimate Guide, which has gone down particularly well, but this is just the start of what's to come. Add in the fact that many of the last-gen systems are now nearly a decade old, and things start to become even more exciting.

If you've just read that last sentence and are already beginning to visualise wall-to-wall content of PlayStation 2 and Xbox games then I ask you to not worry and to trust me. After all, have I let you down yet?

Enjoy the magazine,



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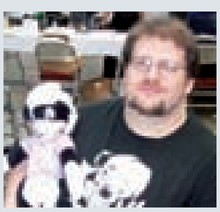
>> Load 80 Breathing new life into classic games

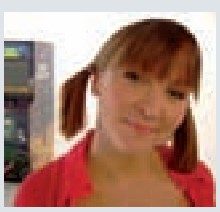
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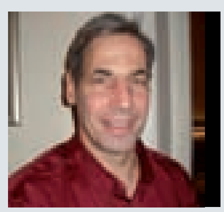
RETRO REVIVALS



In the hot seat this month…







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" A mash-up of Manic Miner and Chuckie Egg "

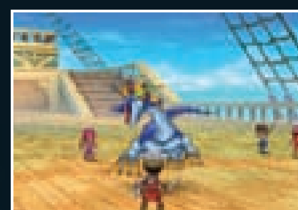
Craig Grannell



retro GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

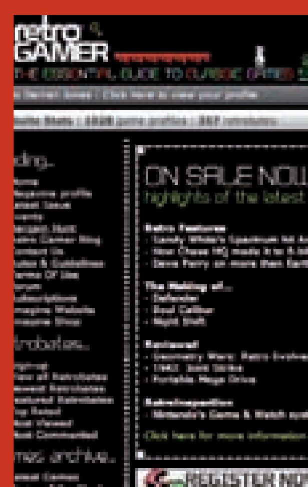
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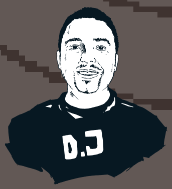


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>> This year's E3 may have been and gone but, rather unusually, that hasn't stopped publishers and developers inundating us with lots of great new games, including brand new Oddworld titles and Street Fighter/Tekken crossovers.

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TO BE THIS GOOD TAKES SEGA

SEGA UNLEASHES ITS NEXT WAVE OF CLASSIC FRANCHISES

Every now and then something magical happens at work. These moments usually occur when Stefan McGarry comes to visit and show off the latest Sega games. This time was no different, and there was so much Sega goodness to bring along, Kate Billingham (our second-favourite Sega PR) had to help as well.

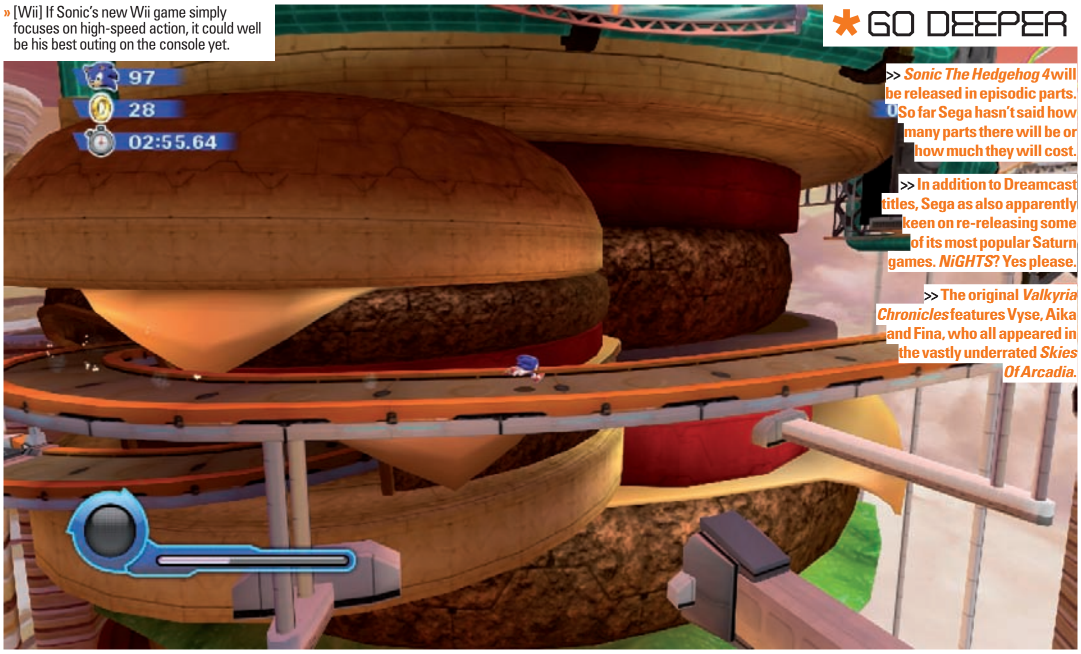
While the rest of the office crowded in to see Platinum Games' upcoming *Vanquish* – which admittedly looks rather excellent – we had far bigger hedgehogs to fry. In fact, we had three of them. In addition to playing *Sonic The Hedgehog 4*, we were also able to get hands on both the Wii and DS versions of *Sonic Colours*, which are so different in style, they may as well be two separate games.

First up was *Sonic The Hedgehog 4*, and we're delighted to say that it's shaping up very nicely indeed. While we're still not happy with his running animation (we're fussy buggers) the actual gameplay is coming along well. What's impressed us most is the excellent level design, which features lots of different routes through each stage and the potential for excellent timed runs and score attacks. Indeed, it's possible to complete the first stage in 32 seconds (although Darran's ineptitude meant he couldn't even manage three minutes), which is bound to have fans of the old-school *Sonic* games rubbing their hands with excitement. Music and aesthetics are also of an incredibly high standard, easily capturing the feel of the Mega Drive games, and even your first encounter with Dr Robotnik (Eggman is a rubbish name) will invoke many fun memories.

Sonic Colours is also looking like a great traditional *Sonic* game. The new gimmick here – it wouldn't be a new *Sonic* game otherwise – is the addition of Wisps, which are strange creatures that give Sonic a number of abilities, ranging from lightning attacks to the ability to drill underground to get additional rings. It plays extremely similarly to both *Black Knight* and *Secret Rings* (no bad thing in our book) and, providing it simply sticks to all-out racing, could well be the best *Sonic* Wii game yet.

The DS version of *Sonic Colours* is also looking good. Developer Dimps has already proved it knows how to make a fun 2D *Sonic* game – it was behind the GBA titles and both *Sonic Rush* and *Sonic Rush Adventure* – and *Colours* appears to have everything you'd expect from a 2D *Sonic* title. We've not noticed any of the killer holes that could sometimes ruin the *Rush* games, but it's difficult to say at such an early stage.

The final *Sonic* game was *Sonic Adventure* for Xbox Live Arcade. Sadly, it's not the original Dreamcast game, but a 4:3 port of the PC version, but is still a title



» [Wii] If Sonic's new Wii game simply focuses on high-speed action, it could well be his best outing on the console yet.

GO DEEPER

>> *Sonic The Hedgehog 4* will be released in episodic parts. So far Sega hasn't said how many parts there will be or how much they will cost.

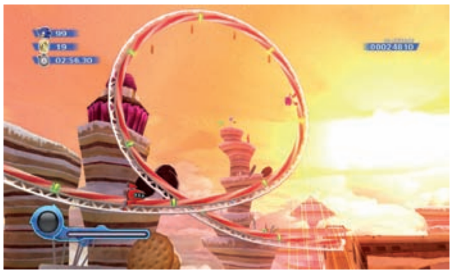
>> In addition to Dreamcast titles, Sega as also apparently keen on re-releasing some of its most popular Saturn games. *NiGHTS*? Yes please.

>> The original *Valkyria Chronicles* features Vyse, Aika and Fina, who all appeared in the vastly underrated *Skies Of Arcadia*.





» [Xbox Live Arcade] We're delighted to say that, so far, *Sonic 4* plays as good as it looks.





"The best news is that it will all be available by the end of the year"

YOU WON'T HAVE TO WAIT LONG TO GET YOUR HANDS ON SONIC 4

we're definitely looking forward to. The same can be said for *Crazy Taxi*, which is also heading to XBLA and PSN very soon. We have concerns that it won't quite feel the same due to Sega not being able to resecure the licences for both the soundtrack and the many real-world locations you could visit, but the core gameplay is still brilliant. Add in the promise from Sega of additional Dreamcast titles and the possibility of Saturn games as well, and the future for retro lovers is looking very good indeed. Granted, there's no news as to whether any of these later titles will be third-party Dreamcast releases, or just titles by Sega, but the publisher still has plenty of excellent first-party games in its catalogue that we'd love to play again.

In addition to lots of *Sonic* love, we were also able to get our hands on both *Phantasy Star Portable 2* and *Valkyria Chronicles 2* for the PSP. Both titles will be available in September and prove that there's still plenty of reasons to support Sony's PSP. *Phantasy Star Portable 2* will be of most interest to our readers and it's looking like a solid addition to the original PSP title. There aren't really many enhancements over the original core *Phantasy Star* gameplay, but there is a new addition that is getting us very excited: online play. As fun as *Phantasy Star Portable* was, the lack of online play was a real pain, greatly killing part of what makes the series so special in the first place.

The final game we were able to play was the sequel to the staggeringly good PS3-exclusive *Valkyria Chronicles* (we're including it here tenuously as the original gave you access to characters from *Skies Of Arcadia*) which appears to have lost none of its charm from being translated to the PSP.

The best news about all this Sega goodness is that it will all be available for release by the end of the year. Needless to say, you can expect full reviews in a later issue of the magazine. *

The games we need on XBLA

» Three Sega gems we'd love to see on the digital services



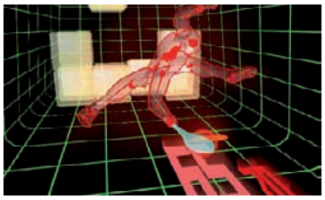
Jet Set Radio

Sega's graffiti-'em-up still plays brilliantly, so we can only imagine how great it would look on a sharp, hi-res sheen. It's certainly tough on the later stages, but the environments and jump in and out nature of the gameplay makes this perfect for a digital download. The soundtrack remains incredible as well, and you wouldn't even need to use the 360's hard drive, unless of course you wanted to listen to music from the excellent sequel. In fact, why not go the whole hog and give us *JSR Future* at the same time, Sega?



ChuChu Rocket

Considering how much of a success *ChuChu Rocket* was on the Dreamcast, we still can't understand why – GBA game aside – Sega has never returned to the franchise. Seeing that the original was fantastic fun when playing online, it's a no-brainer that Sega should be considering this for release. It would benefit from crisper visuals, but *ChuChu Rocket* was such a wonderful little puzzler nothing else needs to change on it. The ultimate party game, for a console that can easily cater for online play.



Cosmic Smash

This is rather left-field, but considering how hard it is to get hold of the original, we maintain that it's a solid choice for inclusion. Picture a cross between *Rez* and squash with a smattering of *Breakout* and it's possible that the end result will match the stark beauty and sublime gameplay of *Cosmic Smash*. Effortlessly cool thanks to its chic old-school-looking visuals and dynamic sound, it's a truly wonderful little title that's bound to pick up a whole new generation of fans if it's re-released to a worldwide audience.

THE RETRO DEBATE

» Which Dreamcast game do you want on Live Arcade?

VISIT RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM TO HAVE YOUR SAY

Shadowman
Jet Set Radio for me. Next to *Shenmue*, it's the game I'd most like to see get an XBLA release due to its addictive gameplay and fantastic soundtrack.

Skull Commander
I'd say *Jet Set Radio* out of that list, but if it could sort the handling in *Daytona* so it's the same as the Saturn version I'd be all over that.

Smurph
Jet Set Radio for me, but I was very tempted by *ChuChu Rocket* for the multiplayer possibilities.

Antiriad2097
Space Channel 5 is the type of game I'm more inclined to download, as it's a game I'd put on for short-burst gaming, suiting the hard drive install.

Weekend_Warrior
Why not just put the arcade version of *Daytona USA* up on XBLA instead of the inferior DC version?

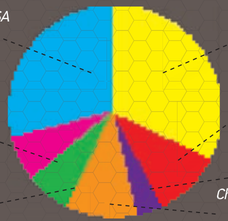
GigaPepsiMan
Out of all the Dreamcast games I have played, *ChuChu Rocket* would be the ideal game for something like Xbox Live. *Daytona* would be incredible if it had online play with all 30 cars, though (which is something that I don't think we got with the PAL version).

ToxieDogg
I'd love to see the original *Powerstone* on XBLA, I honestly thought the sequel was a massive letdown, though. It was confusing at times (the item combining system definitely was) and there were no proper character storylines or proper individual stages for them, and the stages that were there weren't as well designed as in the original game. It felt like it was trying to ape *Super Smash Bros.* too much to me.

C=Style
Daytona USA for sure; though I'd prefer the original over the 2001 DC release. But if I had to have one game for actual gameplay sakes and not nostalgia then it would be *Zero Gunner 2*. One of my favourite shmups, I would love an HD update to that, but they better keep the same control system and not noob it up for the kids who have never used a controller that didn't have dual sticks.

FORUM OPINION

Which Dreamcast game do you most want to see on Xbox Live Arcade?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee has been a fervent gamer since he was tiny. And that was a long time ago. In between playing computer games and collecting crap from eBay, he has presented Channel 4's *The 11 O'Clock Show* and *Rise*, and currently does bits of stand-up as well as presenting the *Two Hour Long Late Night Radio Show* on Absolute Radio at 11pm.



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits, The 11 O'Clock Show and Absolute Radio, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro



Frank's gone. You know he is, he really is

Frank Sidebottom wasn't everyone's cup of tea. But even those who didn't 'get him' have been moved by his passing on Monday 21 June 2010.

Frank was a huge part of my life. Huge. I was introduced to him when I was 14 years old by my friend Malcolm Richmond. He played me one of his Christmas EPs and I was hooked. Here was this weird guy, with a huge head, who sang bad pastiches of songs played on a crappy Casio, while arguing with his ventriloquist puppet. When you put it like that, it doesn't sound like much of an act. But Frank made it work.

He was created to promote the ZX Spectrum game *The Biz*, where you are in a struggling band, trying to make it in showbiz. It's a fun little game, complete with spelling mistakes and bugs. Frank was also the soundtrack to my gaming days. It was either him or The Monkees on in the background as I struggled to get anywhere in *Twin Kingdom Valley*.

My first ever gig was seeing Frank hosting a show at what was then London Central Poly. Also on the bill were underrated indie band The Man From Del Monte, Buzzcock Pete Shelley and Ed Tudor-Pole. Some line-up for a 16-year-old. But it was Frank who stole the show. He was just the most mental act I had ever seen.

I followed Frank for years and then he just kind of drifted out of my consciousness as things that you like as a kid often do. I didn't grow out of him; I just moved on. Until five years ago when I started playing some of his stuff to my wife. I realised that what he was doing was not childish nonsense; this guy was actually a genius. It was brilliant on so many levels.

I was presenting a radio show on LBC and hunted high and low for Frank to get him as a guest. To cut a long story short, we found him and he came in one day. He sat in my studio for an hour, big head on, just messing around and being hilarious. I was 14 years old again and couldn't breathe for laughing. At the end of the show, Frank looked at me with those big eyes and said in that nasally voice, "You're going to hate me now," as he slowly lifted his head off. I was horrified. I didn't want to see what was under there.

But I'm glad I did. That was the day I became friends with Chris Sievey. The faceless genius behind my childhood hero. The man who had, for years, allowed Frank to take the spotlight, never ruining the magic by letting his own ego take over.

Over the next five years I did several gigs with Frank, interviewed him a few times, and was even owned by him on his TV show – YouTube it, because it's hilarious. I am proud to say that Chris was a friend and I'm in tears now as I write this. His death is a great sadness and has hit me harder than I ever thought possible.

> It was either him or The Monkees as I struggled with Twin Kingdom Valley



» [Xbox] *Stranger's Wrath* was a wonderful inventive take on the first-person shooter, but hardly anyone bought it.

JUST ADD WATER ANNOUNCES THE RETURN OF ABE AND ODDWORLD

THERE'S SOMETHING ODD GOING ON

It's been a rough old ride for *Oddworld* fans over the last few years. After the amazingly inventive *Stranger's Wrath* was criminally ignored by the public, Oddworld Inhabitant's Lorne Lanning announced that there would be no new games and that it would look at continuing the franchise in other areas of entertainment media. It would appear, however, that time is a great healer, because several brand new *OddWorld* games are now on the way.

Developer Just Add Water, who recently impressed us with the excellent *Gravity Crash*, announced on its website that it has been working closely with OddWorld Inhabitants for the past 12 months and that it is now working on multiple projects for a variety of platforms. "To work with the team at *Oddworld* has been amazing," revealed Just Add Water's managing director Stewart Gilray. "Being able to tap the minds of Lorne Lanning, Sherry McKenna and others has been fantastic. We're all extremely excited to breathe life into the *Oddworld* universe and indeed to let it breathe life into us."

Abe's Oddysee and *Abe's Exoddus* have both been available on PSN for the last few months and the likes of Steam and GOG for ages now, so it's quite possible that continued interest in these digital downloads has given OddWorld Inhabitants and Just Add Water the incentive to once again visit the series. Sadly, what we don't know at this moment in time is anything about the games themselves. Just Add Water has been very guarded in recent interviews and is not giving any information away as to whether it's working on brand new games or updated versions of the originals.

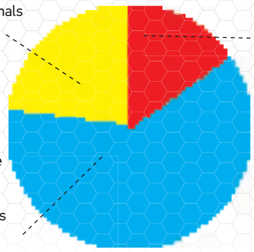
There's also no information as to whether these will be retail or digital releases, but if you consider Just Add Water's track record we're confident that Abe will be appearing on digital services such as Steam, WiiWare, PSN and Xbox Live Arcade.

While we're on the subject of all things *Oddworld*, we're still wondering what happened to the proposed *Oddbox*, a compilation that would feature PC ports of *Munch's Oddysee* and *Stranger's Wrath* in addition to *Oddysee* and *Exoddus*. Originally announced in October of last year and slated for an early 2010 release, we're still waiting for it to appear. Here's hoping Oddworld Inhabitants and Just Add Water reveal more information about their new games very soon. *

FORUM OPINION

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

What do you want the new Oddworld game to be?



Updates of the originals – 23%

A new adventure featuring Abe – 15%

A new adventure featuring new characters – 62%

"A brand new game with brand new characters, just as promised in the original 'vision'." – **TwoHeadedBoy**

"It's got to be an original game, if only to see what Oddities they come up with next." – **Antiriad 2097**

"Abe was apparently very popular with female gamers. I have no idea why - most girls are disgusted by fart jokes!" – **NonShinyGoose**

MICRO BYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



» Time for Tactics

Great news from Japan, as it's been recently revealed that a re-imagining of *Ogre Tactics* is on the way. The original team is getting together to revisit the very first game – which sadly never received a European release – and is promising plenty of subtle alterations to make the experience as enjoyable as possible. We're huge fans of the franchise, so we'll definitely be reviewing this when it's released on the PSP later on in the year.



» Devil may play

There's more *Marvel Vs Capcom 3* love this issue with Capcom announcing four new additions to its ever-increasing roster. Chun-Li, *Devil May Cry*'s Trish and *Okami's* Amaterasu represent the Capcom side, while Doctor Doom, Thor and Super-Skrull are batting for Team Marvel. Needless to say, we're really pleased that Capcom are introducing plenty of new characters to the popular franchise.



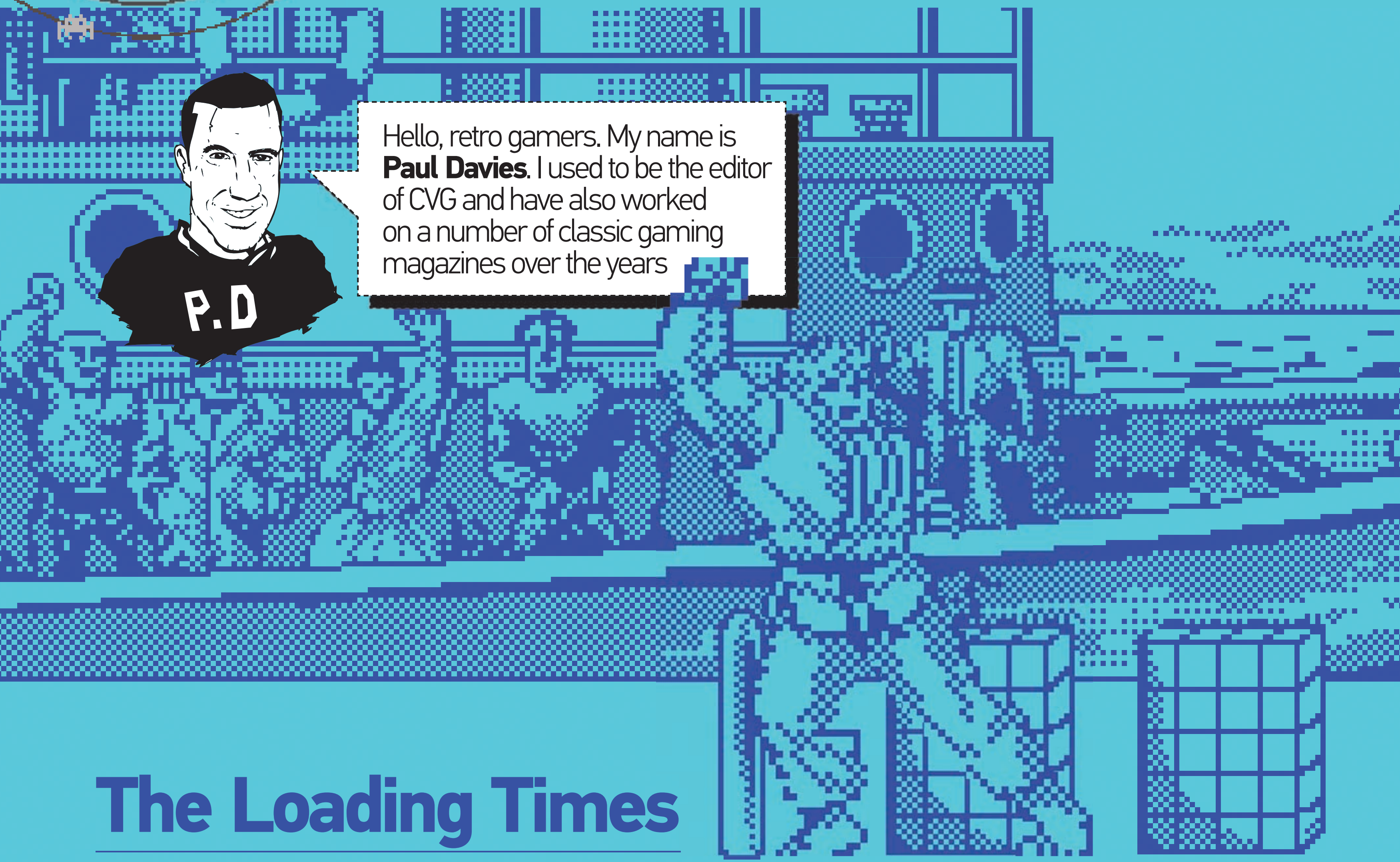
» Drive time

Fans of the hit PlayStation series *Driver* will be pleased to learn that a new game is on the way. No doubt wanting to make amends for the disappointing third part of the series, this appears to be going back to basics, simply focusing on entertaining driving missions. As long as *that* car park level is nowhere to be seen we'll be perfectly happy to get back behind the wheel.

retrocolumns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *CVG*. I led the *CVG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.



The Loading Times

When a game says, 'Please wait', it is better than, 'Just f*cking wait', I suppose. But it's not like you and I ever had the choice. What the good games giveth the loading times taketh away.

This is one conversation that you must avoid trying on normal people. Talk about Crown Green Bowling or the history of Pink Floyd instead. You'll still lose friends, but only because you're boring. Even among gamers, talk of loading times is an early sign of madness. Like pointing out that the wheels on the bus go round and round, then writing a song about it.

Loading times are kind of like a hangover but the other way around. You can't do much about hangovers apart from accept that you'll earn one after too much booze. Ideally you won't mind the hangover because the previous night was amazing. We've long suffered loading times because we assume that the struggle is an essential part of the experience. So, you want to play *ModNation Racers* on the PlayStation 3, do ya? Well, it'll cost some of your life. Give!

Loading times were not always so dull, however. You couldn't just sit there in 1982 and expect that your Sony C90 was going to deliver the goods after ten minutes. Summoning something like Level 9's *Snowball* required a hope and a prayer in addition to a special set of micro-screwdrivers to adjust the reading heads on the hallowed tape recorder. We had all kinds of problems running *The Bard's Tale* on my mate's Electron, which only seemed to load if nobody spoke and everybody in the house was under instruction not to bang any doors. Going to confession every Sunday also helped.

Guys these days who think they have a raw deal waiting for their PlayStation 3 to update, then install, then restart, then load *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11* only to find out that it's a bit average should bear in mind that ZX Spectrum users had to load in each character for every round of *Street Fighter II*. And even Spectrum owners knew the graphics were not quite arcade perfect. Or maybe they didn't.

I've got to say that moving to CD-ROM from cartridge in the Nineties seemed like a backward step to me, though it added to the gadget appeal of the 3DO, Sega Saturn and the first PlayStation. It made you sweat for the best possible graphics; nobody cared about CD-quality sound really. The Dreamcast made a sawing noise, like it was physically constructing *Pen Pen Trilcelon* beneath the hood.

Electric cars will soon be required to make some kind of sound, even though this doesn't help them move. You can make them go 'brum-brum' like an old banger or 'uuuuwaaaugh' like a TIE Fighter. This is so people know it's a car and don't step out in front of one. Maybe when we no longer need loading times, when everything appears instantly – yeah right – via download, we'll still have a variety of loading times to choose from, just so we know we're about to get hit by a videogame.

> The Bard's Tale on my mate's Electron only seemed to load if nobody spoke

STREET FIGHTER FINALLY TAKES THE FIGHT TO **TEKKEN**, AND VICE VERSA

NAMCO AND CAPCOM ANNOUNCE TWO-PRONGED CROSSOVER COLLABORATION



Still loitering on cloud nine following the news that Capcom's *Versus* series is getting a new instalment in the form of *Marvel vs Capcom 3: Fate Of Two Worlds,* this year's Comic-Con brought even more news to delight fight fans: there are two more on the horizon. Capcom has joined forces with Namco to pit the *Street Fighter* series against *Tekken* in two games: one developed by Capcom and another by Namco, mirroring its *SNK vs Capcom* collaboration.

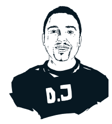
At the moment only the Capcom game, titled *Street Fighter X Tekken*, has been unveiled. A playable demo, which was shown to attendees at the world's biggest and preeminent comic and movie convention, showed how the game will make use of the popular *Street Fighter IV* engine. The brief demo showed Ryu facing off against Kazuya Mishima, and showcased how Mishima's signature moves have been incorporated. It also showed Chun-Li and Nina Williams stepping in to assist their respective franchise partners – though not by tagging them into the fight, we're pretty confident that this option will be present – and help both fighters pull off an EX-style special move.

It's essentially *Street Fighter IV* but with new *Tekken* characters to play around with, but that explanation is doing it a disservice as the game looks stunning. There is currently no news yet as to how Namco's side of the deal, *Tekken X Street Fighter*, will play out, though the thought of seeing Ryu and co pulling punches in an true 3D fighting game has got us awaiting early screenshots with excitement. After all, this should mark the best proper 3D iteration of *Street Fighter* to date, especially as the most recent *Soul Calibur* and *Tekken* games rank among the series' best.

In further news, *Street Fighter IV*'s producer Yoshinori Ono also announced a downloadable online version of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* that's on the way, although he did warn fans not to expect to see it any time soon. We've waited this long, so what's a bit longer going to hurt? *

* WHAT WE THINK

Darran



As interesting as the crossover is, it's *3rd Strike* that I'm most excited about. It remains one of the greatest fighters of all time and the thought of parrying the hell out of my friends online is making me very, very excited indeed.

Stuart



I'm looking forward to seeing how the *SF* characters are going to make the transition into the *Tekken* universe. Namco has become the best studio of 3D fighting games, so if anyone can pull off a true 3D *SF* experience it's those guys.

David



To see the fighting genre re-emerge of late is brilliant and this game is set to be nothing short of epic. Seeing *Tekken* in a 2.5D format has me salivating already. I'll be in the line on release day to pick this up certainly.





WHAT IF?

Your favourite current-gen games remade, retro-style

Subject No 13
Crackdown 2

WE LOVED *CRACKDOWN*, and the sequel is just as good, and in some respects better – it throws mutant freaks into the mix. Anyway, the closest the Speccy got to a simple and insanely enjoyable sandbox adventure was probably *Ant Attack*, but how would it handle the uber-violent world of *Crackdown 2*? Easy: do away with the Xbox game's all-important freedom and turn the game into a run-and-gunner that played like *RoboCop* and *Two Crude Dudes*.



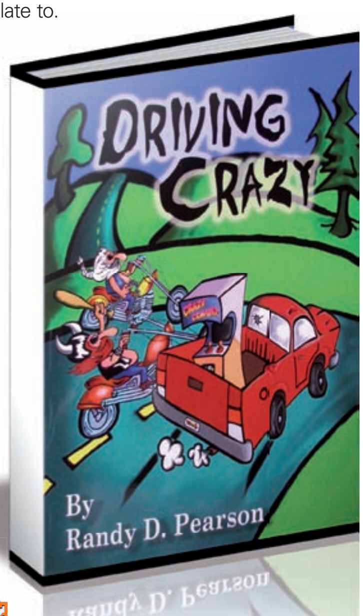
The Vault

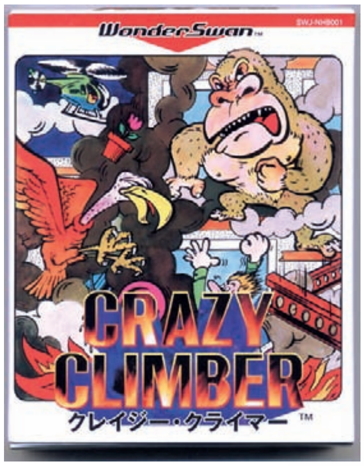
TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

Driving Crazy

■ **RRP:** $12.99 (approx £8.60)
■ **Buy it from:** Riley Press

When Jay Naylor and his chum Austin set off on a road trip from Michigan to California to collect 'Crazy' – an upright *Crazy Climber* machine Jay wins on eBay – what starts out as an excitable drive to pick up the machine soon turns into a nightmare, and it's not long before the duo realise that getting the machine and themselves home in one piece could prove a real challenge. Entertaining and witty, *Driving Crazy* is as enjoyable work of fiction that any arcade enthusiasts and collectors out there will be able to relate to.





Crazy Climber

■ **RRP:** £16.99
■ **Buy it from:** www.genkivideogames.com

Jay and Austin (see *Driving Crazy*) could have saved themselves a lot of bother had they simply visited Genki Videogames and then purchased themselves this version of *Crazy Climber*. Of course they would also need to have a Wonderswan to play it on, but luckily Genki has a few of those on their website too. With an impressive assortment of rare and sought-after import titles at reasonable prices, be sure to check in to see what treasures they have.



Space Invaders man bag

■ **RRP:** $89.99 (approx £59)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Regardless of what you might have heard, there really is no shame in grown men owning bags. After all, Santa carries one, the Easter Bunny's been carrying a wicker basket around for years, and have you actually tried cramming a laptop, iPod, iPhone, hair straighteners and miniature poodle inside your wallet? It's not impossible, but it does waste valuable posing time. Anyway, here's a bag aimed squarely at the affluent metrosexual *Space Invaders* market.

TREASURE OF THE MONTH

Retro videogame propaganda posters

■ **RRP:** $49.99 for a set of five (£33 approx) ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

Some would argue that videogame propaganda is pointless. It's like coming up with a promotional material to influence people to the benefits of not drinking water from festival toilets, or not eating poison. However, we quickly changed our tune this month when we were sent a link to these awesome pieces of retro gaming art – and we used the word 'art' deliberately there. As you can see, some of history's most iconic games been gloriously transformed into authentic looking propaganda posters. The original five, which were produced by artist Steven Thomas, feature the games *Joust*, *Donkey Kong*, *Frogger*, *Dig Dug* and *Tron* and measure 15 inches by 22 inches (portrait), and we think they'd make great additions to any game room. Let's hope they prove popular so that Mr Thomas can get to work on some more. *Space Invaders*, *Half-Life* and *Wolfenstein 3D* next please, Steve.

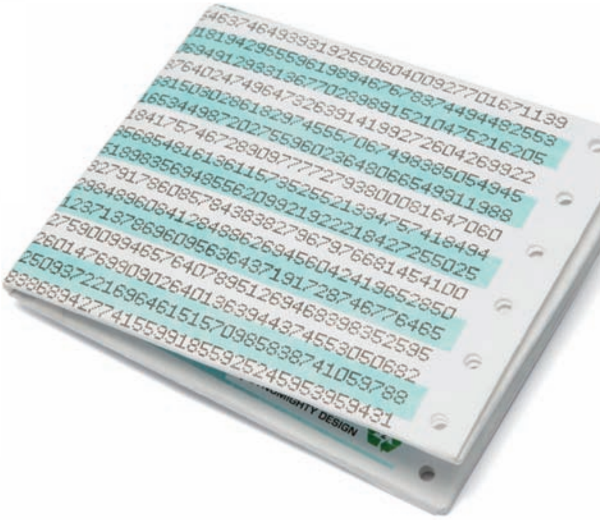




Dot matrix wallet

■ **RRP:** $14.99 (approx £10)
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com

If we've still not convinced you that man bags are the way to live happy and fulfilling lives, then why not purchase an extra wallet instead? That way you can still increase your carrying capacity to prevent you becoming over-encumbered and starving to death. This one from Thinkgeek caught our eye this month as its dot matrix design acts as a good security measure – accidentally leave it on the floor of a bank and people will ignore it, assuming it's an ancient bank statement.



Sonic power-up T-shirt

■ **RRP:** £14.95 **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

This month's T-shirt features another cool bespoke design from the guys over at **RetroGT.com**. It's a *Sonic The Hedgehog* tee that pays reference to some of the power-ups in the game. For this reason the tee is especially geeky as moronic casual gamers out there will simply assume you've splashed out for T-shirt showing computer monitors displaying odd screensavers. For this fact alone, we love it.









Tails fleece hat

■ **RRP:** £24.99 **Buy it from:** www.squareeyed.co.uk

Too barmy not to flag up this month, this fleece hat allows you to wear the head of Sonic The Hedgehog's two-tailed sidekick over your own, like you're some sort of Davy Crockett. Be warned, though, the sight of Tails' hollowed-out cranium could cause *Sonic* fans of a sensitive disposition to cry, and sane adults to cross the street as you approach them. It's probably best not to wear it to any anti-fur rallies either.

Pac-Man shot glasses

■ **RRP:** $29.99
■ **Buy it from:** www.clubnamco.com

The two things that really defined the Eighties were partying and *Pac-Man*. Here, the two come together in perfectly for this series of collectable shot glasses. Each is decorated with a different *Pac-Man* sprite, and the set is presented in a rather exquisite cardboard box, meaning these tempered alcohol containers are guaranteed to double their value in 60 years' time.

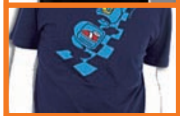
TOP FIVE T-SHIRTS



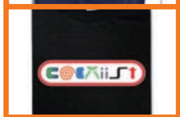
01 Gauntlet
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



02 Amstrad
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



03 Sonic Power-ups
■ **RRP:** $14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com



04 Coexist T-Shirt
■ **RRP:** $15.99 - $17.99
■ **Manufacturer:** Thinkgeek.com
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Dizzy
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
■ **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

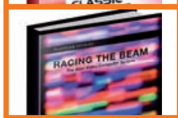
TOP FIVE BOOKS



01 Rogue Leaders: The Story Of LucasArts
■ **RRP:** £34.99 ■ **Publisher:** Titan Books
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



02 Classic Home Video Games 1985-1988 ■ **RRP:** $55 (approx £34)
■ **Author:** Brett Weiss
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.com



03 Racing The Beam
■ **RRP:** £14.95
■ **Publisher:** MIT Press
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



04 Game Over
■ **RRP:** £22.14
■ **Publisher:** Cyberactive Media Group
■ **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk



05 Gamespite Quarterly: Issue 3
■ **RRP:** From $12 ■ **Author:** Jeremy Parish
■ **Buy it from:** www.gamespite.com

TOP FIVE MISCELLANEOUS



01 Pac-Man Hotplate Holder
■ **RRP:** $14.99 (approx £9)
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



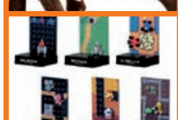
02 Tabletop Arcade Machine
■ **RRP:** Prices vary from £899-1,199
■ **Manufacturer:** Elite Gaming
■ **Buy it from:** www.elitegaming.org.uk



03 Retro Videogame Propaganda Posters
■ **RRP:** £33 ■ **Manufacturer:** Steven Thomas ■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



04 Headcrab Plushie
■ **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
■ **Manufacturer:** Unknown
■ **Buy it from:** www.thinkgeek.com



05 Namco Dioramas
■ **RRP:** £5
■ **Manufacturer:** Namco
■ **Buy it from:** www.japantrendshop.com

Retro Booty

T-SHIRT SPECIAL



Ghost Gear

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Manufacturer:** Genki Gear
- **Buy it from:** www.genkigear.co.uk

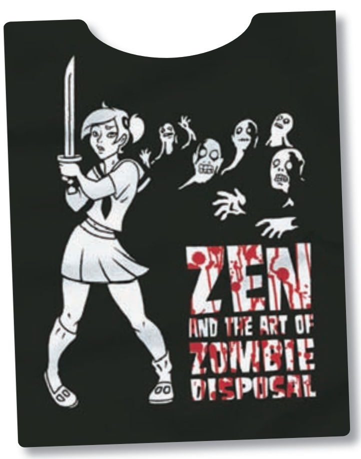
This cool interpretation of the philosophy of the ghost in the machine is a great design from the guys at Genki Gear, as in this case the machine is a DS. If we were a wandering spirit we'd probably haunt a game console too. It sure beats a dusty mansion that smells of old people and oil paintings.



Rampage

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Manufacturer:** Genki Gear
- **Buy it from:** www.genkigear.co.uk

Obviously not directly influenced by the Bally Midway game of the same name, this Rampage T-shirt nevertheless captures the spirit of the game brilliantly. It's a big lizard running amok and terrorising a small community of people that seem to be made of clay. See? The link is uncanny.



Zombie Zen

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Manufacturer:** Genki Gear
- **Buy it from:** www.genkigear.co.uk

There's no better first date attire than a picture of a sword-wielding Japanese schoolgirl administering some hurt on a zombie army. Thankfully, Genki Gear has just the T-shirt. Now just sit back and enjoy a happy and successful social life… online.



Epic Fail

- **RRP:** £14.99
- **Manufacturer:** Genki Gear
- **Buy it from:** www.genkigear.co.uk

'Epic fail' is the phrase coined to rub salt into your embarrassment wounds whether you do something silly. Like accidentally getting mowed down by a tractor or muffing up a Fatality in *Mortal Kombat II*, or, in this case, when you're a rabbit and die of flystrike.



Tank Rush

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

You can never have too many T-shirts of tanks. They are the coolest mode of land transport there is, and have a rich gaming history, from *Battlezone* to *Command & Conquer*. So why not show your love for them by wearing this natty T-shirt and visiting a tank museum?



Syntax Error

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

In a made-up survey it was discovered that 'Syntax Error' is the single worst name for any aspiring band. Thankfully, Retro GT is all about clothing and not music, so this quirky T-shirt works on all levels. It's not a style error, unless it's worn under lederhosen.



SNES Joypad

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Few controllers are recognisable enough to have their own T-shirt, but the Super Nintendo pad is one of them. Probably the most iconic and copied pad of all time, the six-button dog-bone design revolutionised controllers, making this T-shirt a must for any SNES fan.



Pilotwings

- **RRP:** £14.95
- **Manufacturer:** Retro GT
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

Keeping with the theme of Super Nintendo is this great *Pilotwings* T-shirt, which features a print of the game's iconic 'fly a biplane through floating green necklaces' stage. Oh, and there's even a bonus rogue hang-glider too… or is that an oversized boomerang?



Jurassic Park

- **RRP:** £19.00
- **Manufacturer:** Nerdoh
- **Buy it from:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

With *Jurassic Park* hysteria long since over, you can buy this cool InGen T-shirt in confidence, safe in the knowledge that you won't be accused of bandwagon jumping. What's that? The films and games are rumoured to be getting a reboot? Damn you, chaos theory!



Resident Evil

- **RRP:** £19.00
- **Manufacturer:** Nerdoh
- **Buy it from:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

Resident Evil has become the most convoluted series ever. With new characters, spin-offs and virus strains added with each release, it's starting to resemble a bad sitcom. But one thing binds them all: the shady Umbrella Corporation, whose motif is the basis of this cool branded T-shirt.

Arkham Asylum

- **RRP:** £19.00
- **Manufacturer:** Nerdoh
- **Buy it from:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

That you'd want to wear a T-shirt that actively promotes an insane asylum, fictional or otherwise, is a bit weird, don't you think? It's a bit like wearing a T-shirt to promote your local chemist or favourite petrol station. We can only deduce that the popularity of Batman's recent videogame outing will sway fashion experts.

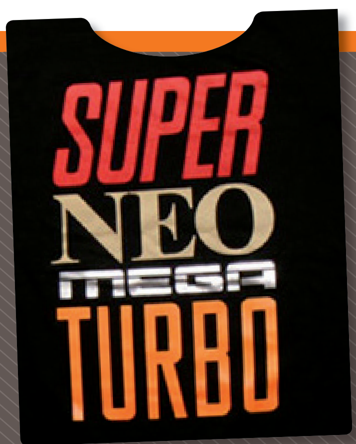


Barnett College

- **RRP:** £19.00
- **Manufacturer:** Nerdoh
- **Buy it from:** www.nerdoh.co.uk

Buying fictitious college T-shirts is an excellent way for lazy people to fool complete strangers into thinking that they're educated. Just don't go trying to convince any *Indiana Jones* fans that you went to Barnett College, which is where the archaeologist teaches. They'll see through your ruse.











4th Gen

- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** Meat Bun
- **Buy it from:** meatbun.verbsite.com

Now here's a cool T-shirt. Celebrating the fourth generation of games consoles, it uses the logo fonts of four of that gaming era's most popular machines to display the term 'Super Neo Mega Turbo'. All you need is a cap saying 'Hat Adventure' and you're all good to go.

Ninjawarrior

- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** Meat Bun
- **Buy it from:** meatbun.verbsite.com

Meat Bun has some really cool retro T-shirts, and many are quite subtle, so that only the most hardcore of gamers will likely get the references. Take this T-shirt of the female blonde-haired member of Taito's *Ninja Warriors* cast, done in the style of Japanese ukiyo-e art.

Gilius Thunderhead

- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** Meat Bun
- **Buy it from:** meatbun.verbsite.com

Everyone knows that Gilius is the coolest character in the *Golden Axe* series. What the dwarf lacks in height he certainly makes up for in facial hair. This shirt has a peculiar *Super Mario World* feel to it.

Cammy 1942

- **RRP:** $24.99 (approx £16)
- **Manufacturer:** Meat Bun
- **Buy it from:** meatbun.verbsite.com

One of our favourite T-shirt designs, it splices together two Capcom franchises brilliantly: *Super Street Fighter II* and *1942*. You could easily see Cammy emblazoned on the side of a fighter plane, distracting enemy pilots with her cheeky upside-down bent-spine cyclist pose.



A MOMENT WITH… Eric Schwartz

Each issue, we put an industry legend in the hotseat. This month, we have a chat with famed Amiga animator Eric Schwartz

Who is Eric Schwartz?

Back in the days of the Amiga, Schwartz was Mr Animation, producing popular cartoons on the system, perhaps most famously the introduction to Team17's *Superfrog*. He is also the creator of Amy the Squirrel and one of the world's longest-running web comics, and has won the Bit.Movie contest several times.

Which of your animations would you recommend to our readers and why?
'The Anti-Lemmin' Demo'. I wouldn't call this parody on *Lemmings* my best work, but it's probably my most famous, at least back in the day. Also my Amiga tribute, which can be found on YouTube and elsewhere. It takes the song *Still Alive* from *Portal*, and subverts it into a twisted history lesson for the Amiga and its fans. Admittedly its entertainment value is proportional to one's familiarity with the Amiga system, so your mileage may vary.

What is your proudest memory?
Probably when I discovered my work was being covered in magazines such as *Amiga Format*. It was a bit of a revelation that my creations were being viewed outside the United States. I'm pretty proud of that press coverage, and held on to many of the old magazines.

Which game or character do you wish you could have worked on?
Sometimes I think it would have been fun to be a part of one of the big 'character' franchises like *Mario* or *Sonic*. I also wish I could have been a greater influence on the in-game graphics of *Superfrog*, the majority of which were complete by the time I was asked to work on the intro. I might have steered the game toward a more fully animated style, similar to *Earthworm Jim*.

What opportunities has computer animation given you?
My animations have given me enough exposure to attract a fair amount of work. I could have even animated for a feature film if the timing had worked out – I was in college at the time, and reluctant to abandon it. Starting with my own projects gave me confidence that I could follow my own path, for whatever good that did me.

"It was a bit of a revelation that my creations were being viewed outside the United States"



» [Amiga] Amy the Squirrel became an unofficial mascot for the Amiga platform.

What's your darkest memory of being in the computer industry?
For me that would have to be when Commodore computers filed for bankruptcy in 1994, along with the year or so of uncertainty that followed. That was a difficult time for any Amiga user or fan.

And your best?
It was nice to find out that the end of Commodore was not the end of the Amiga. I was always happy and eager to learn about any new developments that could add to my toolbox.



Can you share one interesting anecdote about your time in the industry?
I never really considered myself part of the industry as much as just a person viewing from the sidelines. However, I often found it funny that in the magazine coverage of my Amiga animations, the columnists frequently mistook any feminine character I drew for my first 'celebrity', Amy the Squirrel. I took it as a cue to diversify the design of my creations more.

How has the industry changed?
A couple of decades ago computers were still strongly in the territory of the technophiles and hobbyists. Now computers are more like a commodity, a standard tool for everyday tasks. I wouldn't call either era better than the other, though I do miss the 'old days'. I'm not sure I would be the kind of person I am today if not for the tech and culture of 1989, when I was making the most of the Amiga. *



» [Amiga] Schwartz may not have ever got to work on *Sonic* directly, but that's not to say he hasn't had a bit of fun with *Superfrog*.



20 August – 16 September

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



20 August 1985
■ Ultimate releases its first game using the Filmation II engine, *Nightshade* on the Spectrum. Basically, you get to wander around more…



20 August 1993
■ *Return To Zork* is released by Infocom/Activision. It's the first *Zork* adventure to employ the point-and-click system rather than text entry.



21 August 1998
■ *Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six*, the stealth/tactical shooter, makes its UK debut on Windows PCs.



24 August 1992
■ For blood, snot and gruesome finishing moves look no further than the coin-op release of *Mortal Kombat*. Finish him!



28 August 1965
■ Satoshi Tajiri, videogame designer and creator of *Pokémon*, is born.



27 August 1992
■ *Super Mario Kart* is released on the SNES in Japan with the US release following on 1 September. Sleepless nights for gamers were to follow…



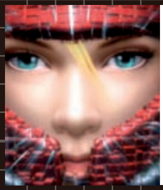
26 August 2005
■ *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe* arrives in the UK on PS2 and Xbox.



25 August 1997
■ The name's Bond… *GoldenEye 007* by Rare is released on the Nintendo 64 and suddenly everyone becomes armchair sniper experts.



28 August 2009
■ Na na na na, na na na na Batman! The most excellent *Batman: Arkham Asylum* is released on PS3 and Xbox 360 in the UK.



31 August 2010
■ *Metroid: Other M*, the latest instalment of the popular franchise, is scheduled for release in the USA.



5 September 2008
■ *Spore*, a God-like game split into five distinct stages, is released in Europe.



6 September 1993
■ The Amiga CD32 was released in the UK. It sold poorly, helping Commodore to go into bankruptcy in April '94.



12 September 2003
■ *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic*, the superb RPG, is released on the Xbox in the UK.



9 September 1998
■ Sega's underrated console, the Dreamcast, makes its worldwide debut in the US of A.



7 September 2007
■ The 11th game in the *Medal Of Honor* series, Airborne, is released for the Xbox 360 and PC in Europe.



7 September 1987
■ The children's RPG TV show, *Knightmare*, debuts. It combines airbrushed artwork and computer graphics with real action.



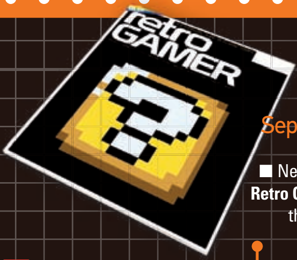
14 September 1995
■ *Star Fox 2* for the SNES was due to be released. It was completed but never made it onto shelves.



14 September 2001
■ *Mario Kart Super Circuit* arrives in the UK for the Game Boy Advance, the first handheld version of the racing favourite.



16 September 2010
■ The four-day Tokyo Game Show begins. Unlike E3, the last two days are open to the public.



16 September 2010
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

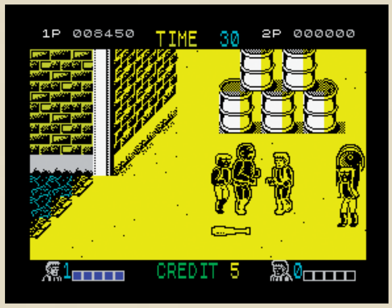
BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



» [Atari ST] Larry finally made his debut on the ST and Amiga. Sierra knocked another one out shortly afterwards… fnarr…



» [Spectrum] *Double Dragon* arrives on the 8-bit micros and is duly panned. The Spectrum version was awful…



» [Commodore 64] *Die Hard* took an absolute age to make it onto the 8-bit micros and then only on the C64.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM SEPTEMBER 1988

SEPTEMBER 1988 – SEUCK it to me, star coders get Bombuzaled, Melbourne House chases Double Dragon, action heroes get pixelated while Leisure Suit Larry struts his stuff in pursuit of carnal lust. Richard Burton digs out his wet wipes…

If you were an Amiga or ST owner with a head full of aliens and a penchant for blasting all and sundry but, crucially, no programming skills, you might have wanted to invest in the *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit*.

The original Commodore 64 version of *SEUCK*, developed by Sensible Software, had been out since the turn of the year and had already gained quite a following. Sensible once again developed *SEUCK*, with Palace Software marketing it. Strangely the finished product, while still a fine piece of work, was somewhat lacking in comparison to the Commodore 64 original. Still, for £24.99 the chance to pour your frustrated programming thoughts onto the screen and manifest it into something vaguely playable would surely make it worth the outlay.

Imageworks, Mirrorsoft's publishing label, revealed something of a coup with a collaboration between coding royalty: Antony Crowther and David Bishop. *Bombuzal* was a testing puzzle game in which the task of clearing varying sizes of bomb from the tiled levels wasn't always as obvious and clear cut as you would think.

Although not unique in style, *Bombuzal* was certainly unique in construction. Apart from the main Crowther/Bishop creative team, there were also levels designed by guest programmers including Jeff Minter, Jon Ritman and Andrew Braybrook. The game was a polished affair, although magazine reviews of the game wavered drastically in opinion, but it sold well enough to warrant conversions to the SNES and PC. Oddly the Spectrum and CPC versions failed to materialise.

Melbourne House began its assault on the Christmas software charts by announcing that it would be converting *Double Dragon*, Taito's popular coin-op arcade hit, with versions available for the C64, Amstrad and Spectrum as well as the ST, Amiga and PC.

Domark was a funny old software house. In 1986 it released the sliding puzzle game *Split Personalities*. It had to undergo a name change from the original name of *Splitting Images* because Central Television, producer of the rubber puppet satire fest known as *Spitting Image*, suffered a severe bout of humour failure and took exception to the packaging that alluded to a tie-in with its programme. A breach of copyright was promptly filed.

So fast forward to 1988, and who should be asked to develop a licensed game based on said TV show? Step forward Domark, which cunningly bagged the deal even after previously suffering the wrath of lawyers from its new client.

The resulting game turned out to be a world leader beat-'em-up featuring Margaret Thatcher, the Pope and Ronald Reagan, among others. It sounded good in theory; in reality it wasn't. It was too easy,



» [Spectrum] Hold a chicken in the air, stick a deck chair up your nose. Rubbish song and the game wasn't much better…



» [Commodore 64] With several top coders contributing to this collective work, *Bombuzal* still managed to split opinion.

SEPTEMBER 1988 NEWS



» Greg Louganis attempts a new dive in qualifying: a triple somersault and double pike with 14 stitches.

10 September saw a helicopter crash involving Mike Smith and Sarah Greene, presenters on the BBC Saturday morning kids' TV show *Going Live*. The helicopter, flown by Smith, crashed after losing power, leaving him with a broken back and Greene suffering two broken legs. They got married a year later after recovering.

17 September saw the start of the 24th Olympiad held in Seoul, South Korea. Among the memorable moments were Ben Johnson's steroid-assisted 100-metre world record run of 9.79 seconds; US diver Greg Louganis suffering a concussion after cracking his head on the springboard; and the infamous opening ceremony, in which white doves, released as a sign of peace, were burnt alive as they flew through the Olympic flame.

On 29 September the first Space Shuttle mission after the Challenger disaster in January 1986 launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida. The launch of Discovery was delayed for 90 minutes due to adverse weather conditions, but it finally took off with its payload of a communications satellite.

30 September saw the premiere of the cheese-encrusted horror spoof movie, *Elvira: Mistress Of The Dark*, starring Cassandra Peterson. If you like your comedy horror stuffed to the nips with boob jokes, this movie was for you.



» Best get a coat on, love. Looks like the weather's on the turn…

had inadequate graphics and was a waste of good source material.

Walking Circles, the dev behind the C64 and Spectrum versions of *Spitting Image*, revealed that it had another project under way in *Wanderer 3D* for Elite Systems.

This vector space-trading shoot-'em-up promised a 3D option with the aid of those green/red glasses. While the effect worked if you stood on the other side of the room and squinted, the game itself was mind-numbingly lifeless, with dreary graphics.

Budgeteer Firebird revealed that it had signed up Probe Software to develop three games for it. Probe had already produced two excellent Spectrum budget games for Firebird, *Down To Earth* and the simplistic yet highly addictive *Harvey Headbanger*. The three new games would be the scrolling arcade adventure *Savage*, obscure coin-op conversion *Mr Heli* and the eminently forgettable *Dynamic Duo*.

Like a gathering of the Planet Hollywood founders, four new licensing deals based on four new movies starring three huge action stars were unveiled this month.

Firstly, Ocean planned a shoot-'em-up based on the Stallone movie *Rambo 3*. Next was Activision, which had bagged itself a Bruce Willis and *Die Hard* deal, while Grand Slam was translating the Schwarzenegger movie *The Running Man*. Ocean completed the movie licence mayhem by adapting the Arnie movie *Red Heat*.

Most were to be released across all popular systems, except *Die Hard*, which only made it out on the C64, with DOS and NES versions belatedly appearing.

It's not very often you can say that you're looking forward to the forthcoming port of a DOS or Apple II game, but the wait was finally over for ST and Amiga gamers when *Leisure Suit Larry In The Land Of The Lounge Lizards* marked the character's first UK appearance.

The aim of the game was to get Larry to bed a woman before midnight. He needs money, as buying gifts to woo potential shags as well as paying for taxis to transport you around were both central. Luckily, cash could be won in the casinos.

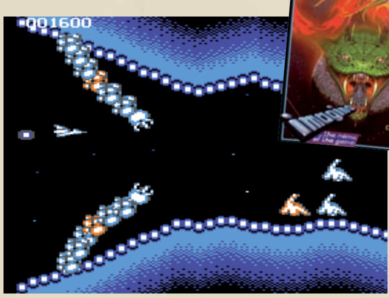
Initially Sierra didn't want to spend anything on advertising *Lounge Lizards* due to its dubious content. However, its reputation spread through word of mouth and the series became one of Sierra's most lucrative franchises.

In the magazines, *Amstrad Action* gave its Mastergame award to *The Bard's Tale* (Electronic Arts), with the lesser Rave award bestowed upon *Mickey Mouse* (Gremlin Graphics).

Zzap!64 gave *The Last Ninja 2* (System 3), *Salamander* (Imagine) and *Wasteland* (Electronic Arts) a Sizzler. With no Gold Medal game this month, *Slimey's Mine* (Firebird) took the Silver Medal for budget gaming grandness.

Its sister magazine *Crash* had very little to get excited about, with just one Smash for Spectrum gamers, *Platoon* (Ocean).





» [Commodore 64] A first-rate conversion of the arcade classic and arguably one of the best shooters on the C64.

THIS MONTH IN…

ACE



ACE looked at new software companies. Featured were Big Apple Software and Ubisoft… and look at them now. Big Apple released just one Spectrum game, while Ubisoft became the fourth biggest videogames company in the world.



CRASH



Rafaelle Cecco's log continued this month with progress reports on *Cybernoid II* and *Stormlord*. Lack of memory was the main problem, with just 3K left on the Spectrum *Cybernoid II* project to insert a soundtrack and screen definitions. Some coding prunery was in order…



CPC COMPUTING



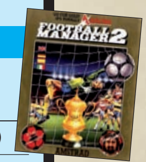
Computing With The Amstrad became *CPC Computing* and featured an interview with Grand Slam. Director Stephen Hall commented that its new game, *Peter Beardsley's International Football*, looked to be the best football game to date. It was, in fact, a turd of a game.



CHARTS

SEPTEMBER 1988

AMSTRAD



1. Football Manager 2 (Addictive Games)
2. Yogi Bear (Alternative)
3. Ace (Cascade)
4. Airwolf (Encore)
5. The Rocky Horror Show (Alternative)

SPECTRUM



1. Football Manager 2 (Addictive Games)
2. European 5-A-Side (Firebird)
3. Ace (Cascade)
4. Yogi Bear (Alternative)
5. The Rocky Horror Show (Alternative)

AMIGA



1. Interceptor (Electronic Arts)
2. Aaargh (Melbourne House)
3. Buggy Boy (Elite)
4. Fire & Forget (Titus)
5. Peter Beardsley's International Football (Grand Slam)

MUSIC

1. Groovy Kind Of Love (Phil Collins)
2. He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother (The Hollies)
3. Teardrops (Womack & Womack)
4. The Harder I Try (Brother Beyond)
5. Lovely Day (Bill Withers)



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] What's not to like in *Shinobi III*? You battle bosses and also get to ride a horse and go surfing!

CHARTS

MARCH 1993



MEGA DRIVE

1 Sonic The Hedgehog 2 (Sega)
2 John Madden Football '93 (Electronic Arts)
3 Speedball 2 (Virgin/Bitmap Brothers)
4 Alien 3 (Arena Entertainment)
5 Desert Strike (Electronic Arts)

» [Amiga] After the novelty of your arms and legs falling off had worn away, *The Incredible Crash Dummies* got old really fast.







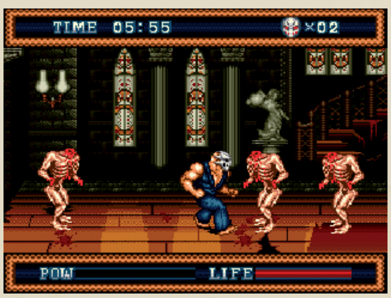
THE LATEST NEWS FROM MARCH 1993

MARCH 1993 – Splatterhouse 3, Shinobi III, Chuck Rock II, Game Child con, console modem wars, Test Dummies crash and burn while the Barcode Battler arrives. Richard Burton swipes a barcode only to find that Jaffa Cakes are still 97p…

If mashing heads and splatting monsters is your thing then the news that work had begun on *Splatterhouse 3* for the Mega Drive would surely get you wiping the flesh off your baseball bat with extra gusto.

As in previous versions, you attempt to destroy all in your path, but the new non-linear format meant that you could finish a level in several ways rather than following the conveyor belt route through a game, leading to multiple level endings and more playability.

Another game returning for a third outing was *Shinobi III: Return Of The Ninja Master*… or at least it was hoped to be after a less than enthusiastic play test by Sega's in-house testing team. It was sent back to the developer, Megasoft, to be worked on for another couple of months with a revised release date of July.



» [Mega Drive] It's a shame it was only released on the Mega Drive, as *Splatterhouse 3* was the best one yet.

The extra effort seemed to pay off as *Shinobi III* was a polished and accomplished side-scrolling beat-'em-up. It was just a shame it was only released on the Mega Drive – and Wii a mere 16 years later – as it was easily the best of the *Shinobi* games to date.

Core Design announced that the sequel to *Chuck Rock*, the well-loved platform game, was ready for release on the Amiga, with Sega console versions available shortly afterwards. *Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck* was more of the same with similar graphics while retaining the humorous elements of the original. A big plus was the level design, which was much improved from the original, ensuring good reports from reviewers and gamers alike.

Blatant gaming rip-off of the month must surely go to Maxim and its attempt to pilfer potential custom from Nintendo with its new handheld game, the Game Child. It looks like a Game Boy and at a bargain retail price of just £10.99, unknowledgeable parents the length and breadth of the UK must have been taken in with this poor man's Game Boy doppelganger.



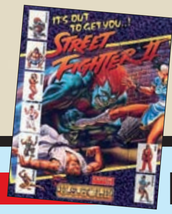
» Game Child was unashamedly designed to look like Nintendo's handheld. However, it was completely and utterly pap.

The handheld itself wasn't even a console but a rather shabby LCD-style game akin to the Game & Watch era. So one game for a smidge under £11 didn't look all that spectacular after all. What did come as a surprise, however, was that Nintendo didn't revert to type and sue Maxim to within an inch of its life.

There was more handheld diversity coming to UK shores, with Epoch releasing its Barcode Battler LCD game. Having been a hit in Japan when it was released two years ago, the newer Barcode Battler II was released in the UK as Commerce Conflict: Barcode Battler, priced at £29.99.

The concept of the game was that you would swipe random barcodes through the device, which would generate characters such as wizards and warriors with their own set of values and strengths with which you would take on your opponent in a







SNES

1 Super Mario Kart (Nintendo)
2 Street Fighter II (Capcom)
3 WWF Super WrestleMania (LJN)
4 The Simpsons: Bart's Nightmare (Acclaim)
5 Super Mario World (Nintendo)

COMMODORE 64

1 Street Fighter II (US Gold)
2 Street Fighter (Kixx)
3 Golden Axe (Tronix)
4 WWF European Rampage Tour (Ocean)
5 Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk (Codemasters)

MUSIC

1 Oh Carolina (Shaggy)
2 No Limit (2 Unlimited)
3 Mr Loverman (Shabba Ranks)
4 Informer (Snow)
5 Young At Heart (Bluebells)

rudimentary battle. While it came with a set of pre-set cards with defined characters, half the fun was finding new power-ups, characters and enemies among the weekly grocery shop. Although it seemed like a great idea, it failed dismally almost everywhere outside Japan.

On the back of a popular advertising campaign in America promoting road safety, Acclaim, LJN and Virgin would be sharing the rights to release *The Incredible Crash Dummies* on the Amiga and most console systems. The staggered releases ranged from mid-1993 to late 1994, but would they be any good? On the whole the series of releases were mundane and best avoided.

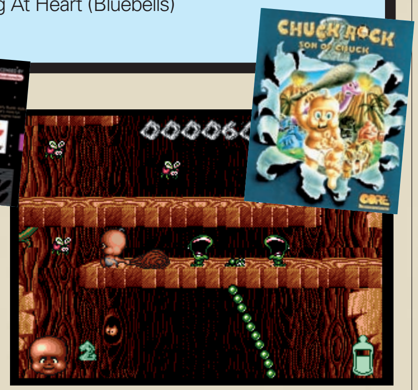
Staying Stateside, rumours were rife of a new modem for the SNES and Genesis that would allow gamers to challenge each other in competitive gameplay. While earlier online gaming attempts, most notable of which were Mattel's Intellivision Playcable and the short-lived Atari 2600 GameLine, failed to live up to expectations, the Teleplay by Baton Technologies looked like it could deliver what it promised.



» [SNES] *Tiny Toons Adventures: Buster Busts Loose* looked to be sickeningly cutesy but was a great platformer interspersed with end-of-level mini-games.

The NES version of the Teleplay had already suffered one failed attempt to go to market under the name Ayota View, after the original partnership between Baton head honcho Keith Rupp and business partner and Atari founder Nolan Bushnell collapsed after Bushnell abandoned the project.

Rupp persevered, enhanced the modem speed and even developed a system for SNES owners to challenge Genesis owners in competitive cross-system gaming challenges. Three games were developed



» [Amiga] Core Design's *Chuck Rock II: Son Of Chuck* proved that not all sequels are quickly knocked out sub-standard money-making cash-ins.

for this purpose: *Terran Wars*, *Battle Storm* and *Sea Battle*.

Things looked to be progressing for Rupp until communications giant AT&T came onto the scene. Sega and Nintendo had both refused to back the Teleplay, with Sega licensing AT&T to come up with a similar product. With the big boys on the scene, no room for manoeuvre with his entry price, and no financial backing, Rupp unfortunately pulled the plug on his project late in 1993. Ironically AT&T's proposed modem also never made it to market.

In the magazine reviews sections, *Sega Force* deliberated over a fine selection of gaming wares, with four Sega Smash awards finally being doled out to March's great and good. Strangely, three of these were Mega Drive titles produced by Virgin Games: *Global Gladiators*, *Another World* and *Mega-Lo-Mania*. *Defenders Of Oasis* (Sega, Game Gear) was the other game of note.

The SNES-loving *Super Play* reviewed a handful of top rating titles, including several imported games, of which *Assault Suits Valken*/*Cybernator* (Masaya), *Tiny Toons Adventures* (Konami), *Super Parodius* (Konami), *Super Tetris + Bombliss* (Bullet Proof Software), *Bulls vs Blazers* (Electronic Arts), *Kiki Kaikai Ninja* (Natsume), *Jimmy Connors' Pro Tennis Tour* (Ubisoft) and *Prince Of Persia* (Konami) scored highest.

The One Amiga kept the home micro gaming end up, highly rating *Body Blow* (Team17), *Lionheart* (Thalion), *Universal Monsters* (Play Byte), *Flashback* (US Gold), *Walker* (Psygnosis) and *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* (Psygnosis).

MARCH 1993 NEWS



» Disgraced 100m sprint champion Ben Johnson was banned for life for using performance-enhancing substances.

5 March saw the Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson banned for life from athletics for failing a second drugs test. He had won the gold medal in the 100m at the 1988 Seoul Olympics only to test positive for a performance-enhancing drug. After being stripped of his gold medal and world record and serving a two-year ban, he resumed competitive athletics but failed a second drugs test in January. It seems the career of the most infamous sprinter of all time had ended.

On 20 March two bombs were set off in Warrington, Cheshire. The bombs, hidden in bins, exploded just after midday when the shopping precinct was packed with shoppers. The blasts killed two: a three-year-old boy and a twelve-year-old boy. A further 56 were severely injured, several suffering loss of limbs. The IRA admitted to carrying out the bombings.

31 March saw the death of actor Brandon Lee, son of Bruce Lee, when he was shot and killed on the set of his latest movie, *The Crow*. The cause was an old bullet head lodged in the barrel of the blank-firing gun used in a shooting scene. The projectile shattered Lee's spine and he died a few hours later.



» Brandon Lee with Ledger-esque make-up. Sadly, the similarities didn't end there…

THIS MONTH IN…

SUPER PLAY



Super Play featured the Winter Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, highlighting two products that dominated proceedings. Nintendo unveiled demos of *Star Fox*, the first game to use the Super FX chip, while the 3DO was launched.



AMIGA FORCE



There's nothing quite like a Top 20 feature to fill a bit of space and *Amiga Force* obliged with its Top 20 Amiga Shoot-'Em-Ups. The top five games on the list were *Jim Power* (Loriciel), *Silkworm* (Tronix), *Turrican 2* (Kixx), *Apidya* (Play Byte) and *Swiv* (Kixx).



N-FORCE



An interesting feature on the Japanese fascination with RPGs, particularly the *Dragon Quest* series, highlighted how fanatical they are. The release of *Dragon Quest V* resulted in mammoth queues, one reportedly 15,000 strong outside a Tokyo electronics store.




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RETROBATE PROFILE

» **NAME:** MATTHEW ASTON
» **JOINED:** 30 JULY 2009
» **LOCATION:** WEST MIDLANDS
» **OCCUPATION:** NOT GIVEN
» **FAVE GAME SYSTEM:** COMMODORE 64

Civilization II

KILL, CONQUER, DESTROY AND PILLAGE!

#28

» PC
» MICROPROSE
» 1996

Now this is my type of war game! Of course, *Civilization II* wasn't all about war; you needed to first develop your civilisation. You start the game with a tribe, build your first city, expand it, and then use its growing population to build more cities. Cities need specialist public buildings vital to their expansion and, of course, troops to defend them against attack. Creating cities expanded your empire.

Like all games in the *Civ* series, technology played a huge part in the game. At first your fledgling society could only build basic warriors, but as the years progressed your empire had access to new fighting units, from swordsmen to musket infantry to riflemen, tanks, planes and nuclear weapons. All of these things had to be researched, of course, along with other technological advances.

One of the new and often comical elements of *Civ II* over its predecessor was the ability to consult your government's High Council. Assuming that you still had the CD in the drive, you would be provided advice as to your nation's progress in the game via video clips. There was a military advisor, who in the ancient eras is often angry, drunk or both, wanting nothing more than to create a huge army and conquer everyone; a nerdy scientist, who becomes geekier as time progresses; a female diplomatic advisor; an economic advisor; and a happiness advisor – an Elvis Presley caricature, who wears sunglasses, even in the ancient period!

While the original *Civilization* had a top-down viewpoint, *Civ II* utilised an isometric style, giving it a more 3D look. Many of the combat problems that plagued the original were fixed with concepts such as firepower and hit points, thus preventing an ancient Greek phalanx from somehow defeating a modern armoured division.

Civ II was also extremely easy to modify; much more so than *Civ III* or *IV*. The game rules were stored in a text file that could be accessed from the game's install directory, and almost all the rules could be changed or modified, creating a huge level of customisation. MicroProse even added a world builder and a scenario editor so you could make your own custom games.

Civ II was my first PC strategy game. It consumed huge amounts of my time as a college student in the Nineties, but it was time well spent! *

Want to appear in the magazine? Be sure to upload your classic profiles at www.retrogamer.net

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO…

#02 Axelay



Instant Expert

The Japanese and North American versions of *Axelay* were launched within a month of each other. European gamers had to wait an agonising 12 months to get their hands on the game

Although Taro Kudou was responsible for the game's excellent soundtrack, Masanori Adachi remixed Level 2's tune, with memorable results

***Axelay*'s soundtrack was** released on CD in Japan on 21 October 1992

The Axelay fighter was featured in the 2004 PS2 release *Airforce Delta Strike*, which was retitled *Deadly Skies III* in Europe

***Axelay* features references** to other Konami titles, the most obvious being the flame dragons on Level 5 – a cheeky nod to similar enemies in *Gradius II*

A beta version of the game was made available, which allowed players to quickly select which level they wished to tackle as well as gain invincibility. This version was used to bug test portions of the game prior to release

***Axelay*'s main programmer** Hideo Ueda has also worked on the *Castlevania*, *Silent Hill* and *Metal Gear Solid* franchises

To get the 'true' ending you need to complete the game on the hard difficulty setting. Completing it on normal results in the mocking message 'Challenge Hard Mode'

In the second of our Ultimate Guide series, Damien McFerran hops into his custom-made cardboard star fighter and charts a course for the Illis System in order to bring you as much information on Konami's seminal SNES shooter as possible

Konami's *Axelay* is a landmark shooter in many ways, but the most striking is the fact that it manages to bring intense alien-blasting action to a format that supposedly struggles with the genre. Much has been made over the years of Nintendo's decision to grant the SNES a CPU operating at a mere 3.58MHz – its rival, the Sega Mega Drive, contained a Motorola 68000 processor, which tore along at a comparatively blistering 7.67MHz – and many critics still maintain that this is the reason for the puzzling lack of decent shmups on the system: the sluggish central processor simply cannot cope with multiple enemies and projectiles on the screen all at the same time, they suggest. There's probably a grain of truth in this assumption, but the theory does come somewhat unstuck when you take a look at *Axelay* in glorious motion.

Released back when SNES titles were still leveraging their graphical superiority over Mega Drive software, *Axelay*'s primary draw was its incredible visuals. Few who were around at the time to witness it in motion can forget the powerful spectacle of the unique rolling perspective, which used the SNES's custom graphics chips to create the impression of flying towards a distant horizon. In truth, it wasn't totally convincing, but it was certainly striking and remains so even today.

Like *Thunder Force II* and Konami stablemate *Salamander*, *Axelay* alternates between horizontal and side-scrolling levels. This essentially gives shooter addicts the best of both worlds, and both variations offer the same degree of amazing and addictive gameplay. Another constant is the flawless standard of presentation; Mode 7 trickery aside, *Axelay* is a jaw-droppingly gorgeous game and arguably one of the best-looking 16-bit shooters ever created. Not only is the screen awash with highly detailed enemy ships, but the bosses are some of the most memorable ever committed to silicon.

Refreshingly, *Axelay* has top-notch gameplay to back up the appealing aesthetics. Unlike the vast majority of other genre classics, *Axelay* features no weapon or item pick-ups whatsoever. As you advance through the game you gain access to more armaments, which can be loaded onto your craft between missions, but essentially you're given all of the tools you need from the outset of the game. Every situation you encounter during the adventure can be dealt with by switching to one of your three available weapon pods – although naturally some are better at the job than others.

Another unique feature is the way in which your *Axelay* craft takes damage. Sustaining a direct hit from a projectile doesn't kill you but instead knocks out whatever weapon

Pixel Perfect

Your guide to the characters of Axelay. How many have you seen?



Critical Reception

What the gaming press thought…



"It's got the best graphics of any game, on any system. Ever. After seeing it, your friends will be so gobsmacked they'll rush out and buy SNESs of their own"

- **SUPER PLAY** 1992

Twin Galaxies High Score

SNES [NTSC]
- **NAME:** PATRICK J DiCESARE
- **POINTS:** 1,974,980



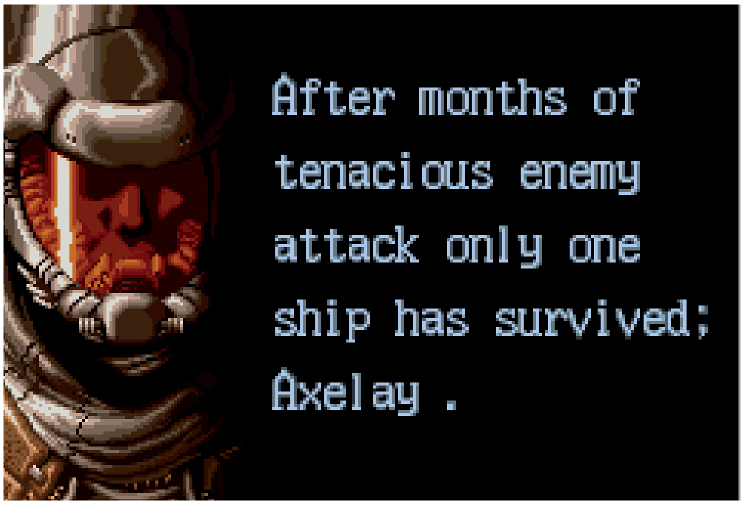
you have equipped at the time. This means you can take three hits before you lose a life. However, this is balanced by the fact that a direct collision with another craft or part of the environment results in your fighter instantly being ripped asunder in a shower of metal.

When it was launched in 1992, *Axelay* gained incredible praise from all quarters, with the gaming press understandably bowled over by the unique faux-3D scrolling and high standard of presentation. Taro Kudou's perfectly suited soundtrack was also held in high regard and is outstanding, even by today's standards.

Given the popularity of the game and its near-dominance of the SNES shooter library, a sequel was almost a given – in fact, the game's ending sequence practically promises a follow-up with the words: 'See you again at *Axelay 2*.' Sadly, despite the rumours and anticipation of fans, Konami never fulfilled that particular pledge. Main programmer Hideo Ueda – who also worked on *TwinBee*, *Quarth* and *Parodius* – remained with the company but Kazuhiko Ishida – who is credited as 'support programmer' on the title – went on to establish Treasure with Masato Maegawa in the same year that *Axelay* was released. It has been a common rumour over the years that other key staffers involved with the game also left Konami with Maegawa and Ishida at the same time, which possibly explains why a planned sequel never materialised.



Today *Axelay*'s standing in the shooter world is as high as ever, with the game regularly appearing in polls to ascertain the greatest shmup of all time. It continues to command a fair price on the second-hand market, but thankfully for those of you that don't relish the thought of paying over the odds for a dusty old cartridge, *Axelay* has also been made available via Nintendo's Wii-based Virtual Console service, where its lofty reputation has resulted in it being discovered and appreciated by a whole new legion of fans.



» [SNES] Poor logistics on the part of the Illis System's defence forces, but the setup made for a great shooter.



Axelay's Arsenal

Here's a rundown of the weapon systems available on your top-of-the-line D117B Axelay fighter



» Straight Laser
A powerful burst of plasma energy, which is one of your first weapons



» Needle Cracker
A swift-firing homing weapon, which seeks out enemy units



» Wind Laser
The final laser upgrade has a wide range of fire



» Round Vulcan
360 degrees of high-velocity death: a vital weapon



» Morning Star
Another weapon handy for taking out several enemies at once



» Macro Missile
A powerful rocket with a large blast radius



» Explosion Bomb
Air-to-ground missiles useful for taking out gun turrets



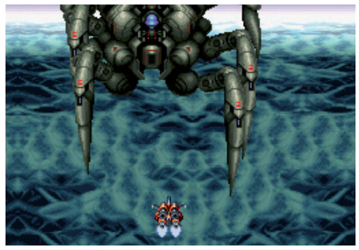
» Cluster Bomb
Quite similar to the Explosion Bomb, but fires backwards

Memorable Moments

Sit back and enjoy Konami's coders let loose on 16-bit hardware



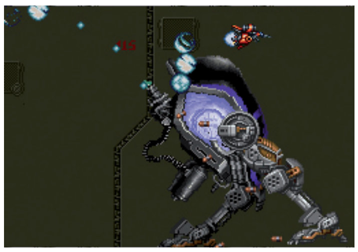
A matter of perspective
Granted, *Axelay*'s Mode 7 scrolling landscape isn't all that realistic and looks a little outdated, but in 1992 it was astonishing. 2D shooters had always been relatively flat affairs, and Konami's graphical trick was impressive.



Afraid of spiders
Arachnatron may not be the toughest boss you'll face, but he's one of the most unforgettable. Almost filling the screen, this beastie shows some stunning animation and was a class above the static guardians in most shooters of the era.



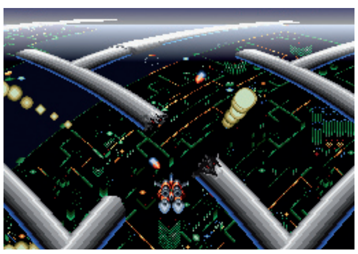
Going sideways
Mixing horizontal and vertical scrolling in shooters wasn't new in 1992 – in fact, Konami had done it before – but that doesn't detract from the shock of entering Level 2 and realising that you're scrolling in a different direction.



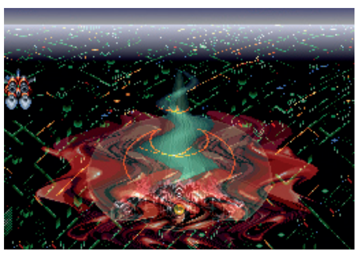
Twenty seconds to comply
In 1992 *RoboCop* was still a household name, and *Axelay*'s second boss is shamelessly based on the scary rogue security bot ED-209. The eerily robotic music further accentuated the rather oppressive nature of this boss battle.



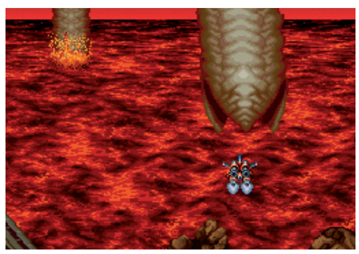
Rings around the world
Level 2 starts off as a typical space station environment, but halfway through you realise that you're in a 'ring world' – a concept made famous in Japanese anime series *Gundam* and the more recent *Halo* titles.



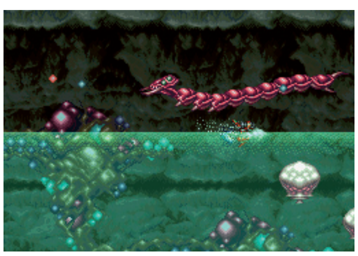
Barrier to entry
Level 3 takes place above the neon lights of a brightly coloured city, but you'll be focused on navigating the vast network of barriers that block your path – taking out the weak segments causes them to plummet towards the ground.



Don't go changing
The third boss that you face starts off looking anything but fearsome, but after taking a beating he morphs into a massive battle station thanks to the incredible graphical power of Nintendo's 16-bit hardware.



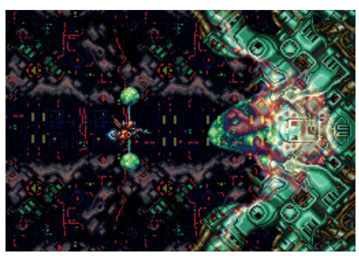
I got worms
Someone at Konami was clearly a Frank Herbert fan, because Level 5 features some massive worms that bear more than a passing resemblance to those witnessed in the author's legendary sci-fi epic *Dune*.



Skimming the surface
Every decent shooter needs an underwater segment, and *Axelay* has one in Level 4. Placing your ship above the surface of the water causes water to splash up; just one of many awesome graphical effects in the game.



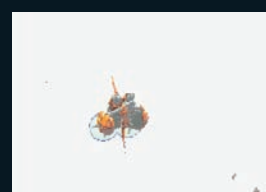
You and whose army?
The final stage throws you in at the deep end, fighting against a bunch of ships so large that they don't even fit on the screen. In terms of pure spectacle it's one of the game's most impressive moments.

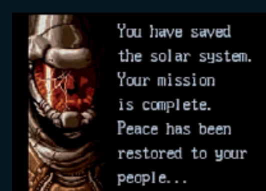


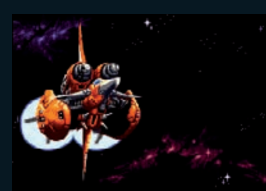
Copycat
The final boss is a sneaky fellow and even goes as far as to replicate your ship and use clones against you. Seeing his scanning field appear and methodically copy your craft is a terrifying – but nonetheless impressive – event.

After blowing away the evil enemy leader you're left to reflect on your incredible accomplishment. The effort was worth it, as you've single-handedly saved an entire star system from the unspeakable horrors of alien oppression. In other words, you're something of a diamond geezer.













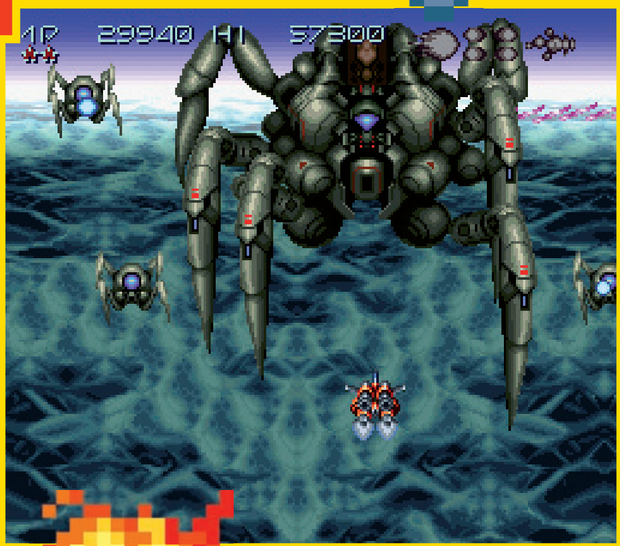
Boss Rush

Many shmup aficionados would argue that a blaster lives and dies by the quality of its boss encounters, and *Axelay* certainly doesn't disappoint in this department. As well as a truly fearsome number of mid-level bosses, the game boasts some of the most unforgettable level guardians to grace the 16-bit era. These epic enemies are notable not only for their variety and cunning tactics, but for allowing the SNES to showcase some of its most impressive visual tricks, with sprite rotation, Mode 7 scaling and smooth animation. Here's a rundown of the supreme beings waiting for you at the conclusions of *Axelay*'s levels.

Arachnatron

Stage One - Cumuluses

Throughout the history of shooters there has been a custom of memorable opening bosses, and the mechanical spider that waits at the conclusion of *Axelay*'s first level certainly conforms to that tradition. Boasting spookily authentic animation thanks to its multi-jointed nature – each limb is a separate sprite – and a fearsome phalanx of baby spider robots supporting from the rear, it's no wonder that Arachnatron has remained indelibly inked in the memory of many a SNES gamer. Naturally, its status as the game's debut boss encounter results in a relatively low degree of difficulty: the tractor-beam web that Archanatron occasionally spits out slows your ship down, making it harder to dodge incoming projectiles, but on the whole you'll find this chap looks a lot more scary than he actually is. Focus all of your firepower on the mouth section initially because, once you destroy it, the web can no longer be fired. After this you should throw all of your available weaponry at the eye, which is the spider's weak spot.



T-36 Towbar

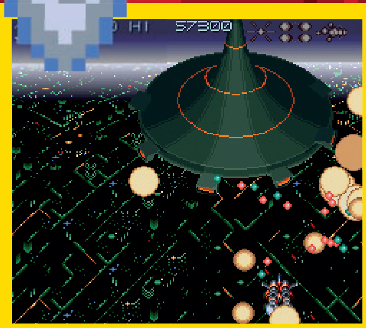


Stage Two - Tralieb Colony

Bearing an uncanny resemblance to bipedal *RoboCop* antagonist ED-209, the T-36 Towbar lurks in a battered and derelict portion at the end of the Tralieb Colony. Animated using a combination of sprites and smoothly rotating Mode 7 effects, this two-legged monster slowly stumbles backwards along the corridor, stopping every so often to attempt to blow your fragile craft out of the air. When Towbar pauses to attack, make sure you're high up near the ceiling of the level. He will either shoot with his machine gun, which can be blasted off if you feel like adjusting the odds in your favour, or engage his deadly laser beam attack. Both attacks can be angled, so you'll need to make sure you're in the top-right corner of the screen to avoid being vaporised. Towbar's weak spot is the exposed motor unit just behind his protective hood; the explosive nature of your missiles or bombs can penetrate his defensives for massive damage. This resourceful enemy is also capable of hurling smaller projectiles your way, so don't let your guard down.



Regenertoid



Stage Three - Urbanite

This end-of-level boss starts off in a rather underwhelming fashion, teleporting onto the screen as a tiny ship before changing into the shape of a spinning top. What it lacks in visual impact it makes up for in raw aggression, though – you'll need to take out the various gun ports on the rim of Regenertoid to put a stop to the hail of bullets that it spews out. Doing this also triggers the second stage of the attack: the rather pathetic cone-like shape is augmented by fearsome red battle armour, complete with devastating laser cannons that fill up large portions of the screen when fired – just make sure you're not anywhere near them at the time. Focus your attack on the centre of Regenertoid's shell and you'll send it packing in next to no time, but make sure you keep moving because this monster's massive size means that on-screen real estate is kept to a bare minimum, making it hard to manoeuvre.



Aquadon





Stage Four - The Cavern

Looking every inch like the kind of crustacean you'd run a mile from if you ever encountered it on a beach, Aquadon ramps up the difficulty level with his multiple attack capabilities. If you don't get taken out by the needle laser blasts and procession of unfriendly minions that swarm around his thick shell, you'll still have to face the prospect of being zapped by his irksome lightning bolt attack. While this isn't deadly in itself, it stuns your craft temporarily and causes your weapons system to go haywire, which often means you'll end up with an attack that is woefully mismatched for the situation, forcing you to quickly re-select the correct armament. Aquadon has two weak spots, both of which must be pushed backwards into his shell before the other opens up. You'll need to pay close attention to which weak spot is exposed at any one time, as you'll more often than not be looking elsewhere on the screen to avoid the many hostile objects flying in your general direction.

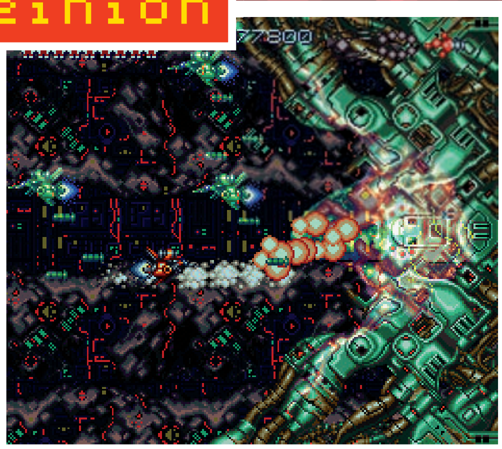
Wayler

Stage Five - Lava Planet

Transported from the soggy depths of the Cavern to the fiery wastes of the imaginatively named Lava Planet, your waterlogged space suit is likely to dry out quickly, but unfortunately you'll also have to face off against one of the game's most famous faces and the cover star of the Western version: Wayler. A massive cyborg capable of withstanding extreme temperatures and clad in molten lava, this brute is yet another example of the SNES's graphical muscle, showcasing smooth, multi-segmented animation and filling almost the entire screen. Like any other self-respecting fire robot, Wayler is fond of spewing flames from his mouth and flailing his enormous arms around like a child at a school disco, causing untold amounts of damage to any spaceship foolish enough to be in close proximity. Be sure to keep well away from those massive mitts of his and channel all of your energy into blasting away at his chest. Doing so reveals his weak spot – a green 'heart' – that, once destroyed, forces Wayler's lifeless body to sink beneath the red-hot planet surface, never to return.



Veinion



Stage Six - The Armada of Annihilation's Fortress

After fighting your way through the hostile alien fleet and infiltrating the enemy base, you're faced with the final challenge: Veinion, the evil leader of the Armada of Annihilation. At first glance he appears to be some kind of robotic overlord, but after ceaselessly blasting away for a while you'll uncover his true form: a horrific alien organism, which has the capability of copying your attacks. Your ship is scanned and Veinion proceeds to hurl clone Axelay craft in your direction. Needless to say, this is the hardest boss battle in the entire game and seems to last for an age. Even when you've finally destroyed Veinion and made good your escape from the rapidly disintegrating alien fortress, the battle is far from over – the enemy leader tries to prevent your getaway by filling the screen with shrapnel and blocking your progress. Land a few well-aimed missiles in his gullet and he vanishes into the ether, leaving the path open for you to return home to a rapturous reception and more canapés and fizzy drink than you can reasonably consume.

RETRO SHAMER

» EXPOSING RETRO GAMES THAT ARE PROBABLY BEST LEFT IN THE PAST

BACK TO THE FUTURE PART III



» [C64] In the C64 version the Doc looks like a cross between Bungle from *Rainbow* and *Planet Of The Apes*' Dr Zaius.

GAME INFO



- **SYSTEM:** SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC, AMIGA, ST, MEGA DRIVE, MASTER SYSTEM, PC
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **PUBLISHER:** IMAGEWORKS
- **GENRE:** ACTION



» [Amiga] The Amiga and ST versions are the best, as they feature crisper visuals and additional cut-scenes.



A WORD FROM THE HERO

"Marty! You gotta come back with me. I've just learnt that in 1991 Probe Software developed a game based on our last adventure. However, during the game's development a rogue vampire bat flew into the game testing room and distracted all the staff while they were checking the first stage. My stage, Marty! I need you to travel back to 1991, get a job at Probe, and make garlic sandwiches for all the staff who were working that day to stop this travesty from taking place!"

With the announcement that Telltale Games is busy working on a new *Back To The Future* title, we're reminded of the fact that there has never been a great *Back To The Future* game. Deciding on which game to play is like choosing between a bowl full of piranhas or Hannibal Lecter to teach you to French kiss. But there is one game in the series that stands out. A game so bad and so poorly designed that it has the odd honour of being the shortest, hardest game in the world. It's true. *Back To The Future Part III* has a shorter lifespan than a Mayfly, yet is harder to thwart than an army of zombies riding T-rexes in *RoboCop* suits.

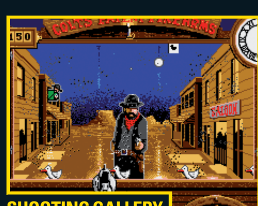
Now you might be wondering how this odd little juxtaposition is possible. Well, it basically comes down to the game comprising a series of four short mini-games that are inspired by scenes from the film, and then Probe, the game's creator, making the first the hardest first level in videogame history. It's a horrible opening stage that finds you steering eccentric inventor Doc Brown across a portrait landscape to save Clara Clayton, whose runaway horse and cart are headed straight for a ravine. Failure to complete your mission will see her suicidal horses gallop straight off the cliff edge, but not before she has time to give off a comical quip just before her skull gets flattened by floor and horse meat, such as, 'I wish I was Mary Poppins' – which, if we're being a bit pedantic here, was first published in 1934, quite a few years after 1885, when the movie was actually set.

However, the most distressing thing about this stage is not that Probe got Mary Poppins' birthday wrong but how unfairly punishing this first stage is. The game throws crates, chasms, errant axes, birds, suitcases, logs and armed cowboys into your rescue mission, and Doc must jump, shoot or duck his way through the level to avoid getting hit. However, as his horse gallops at such a ridiculous speed, reacting to all the obstacles is rendered pretty much impossible. As such, the only way you can finish this stage is to memorise the entire layout of the level, basically grabbing pen and pad and going over it until you can finish it in your sleep.

If you somehow succeed in getting past this stage, three more rubbish levels await, and for these sections you get to assume the role of Marty McFly, for all the good it brings. The second stage is your basic one-screen shooting gallery that finds you shooting ducks, birds and cowboys while avoiding killing innocent cardboard civilians, while the next is quite possibly the weirdest idea for a mini-game ever: an isometric single-screen shoot-'em-up that tasks you with throwing pies at cowboys like some kind of plain-clothed clown with a grievance. The final stage finds Marty collecting speed logs on a runaway steam train while avoiding noxious smoke and once again lobbing pies at Buford 'Mad Dog' Tannen's idiotic gang.

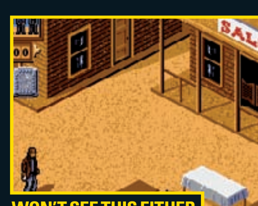
As we said, the *Back To The Future* movies were full of cool little scenes that many would assume would make ideal videogame fare, but maybe our rose-tinted movie specs have blinkered our perspective a little. After all, here's a game that did just that: took four sections from one of the films – and the result was a patchwork quilt of nonsense. Here's hoping that Telltale Games can do something quite remarkable to help alter the series' future.

» THE POINTLESS PARTS



SHOOTING GALLERY

Bothering to have any stage following the first is very pointless, as you'll probably never get to see it.



WON'T SEE THIS EITHER

Just to enforce the point, bothering to have any stage following the first one is a pretty pointless act.



THIS AGAIN?

If you actually made it this far, the last thing you'll want is another obstacle-dodging high-speed chase.

CLASSIC GAMING ON A BUDGET

CHEAP AS CHIPS



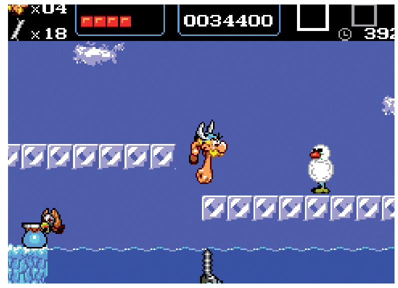
If there's one thing we've learnt about retro gaming, it's that your money can stretch an amazingly long way if you want it to. Granted, a mint copy of *Radiant Silvergun* is going to cost you a small fortune, but there are plenty of other worthy titles that can be picked up for less than a fiver…



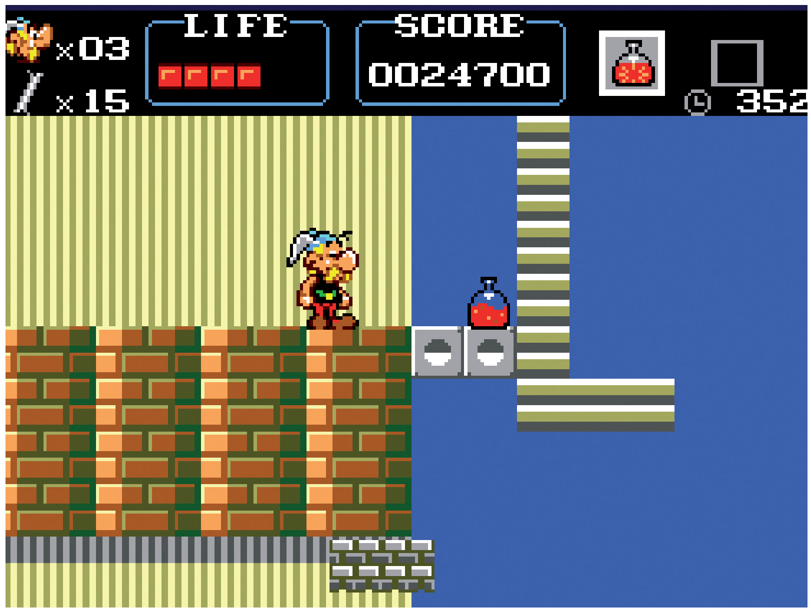
» [Sega Master System] Despite not featuring in the game's title, Obelix was a playable character.



» [Sega Master System] Capturing the essence of the comics perfectly, *Asterix* is one of the best-looking games on the SMS.



» [Sega Master System] The game even has an obligatory snow level. Sega really did think of everything.



» [Sega Master System] Tons of *Asterix* games have found release and this one's certainly up there with the better offerings.



INFO

- » **SYSTEM:** SMS
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

ASTERIX

While the NES had its fair share of classic platform games, the Master System was also home to some equally good examples of the genre. Everyone remembers the adventures of Alex Kidd and the enchanting tales of Mickey Mouse, but there was also a decent trilogy of *Asterix* games, too. Well, we say decent trilogy; *Asterix And The Great Rescue* was actually a bit rubbish.

Anyway, doing a great job in capturing the look, spirit, action and humour of the super-successful comic *Asterix The Gaul*, the first and second games – both developed by Sega – are among the most impressive-looking games to be released on the SMS. So even if you're not an *Asterix* fan, just your interest in games should be enough to carry you through and make you appreciate what these entertaining platformers have to offer.

While many who are familiar with the series would probably regard the second game to be the most preeminent title in the series, owing to its jaw-dropping graphics and animation, we believe that the first game just pips it. Simply titled *Asterix*, the gameplay, levels and challenge are pitched perfectly, and the game on the whole is far more satisfying.

The game's story stays faithful to the Robin Hood-esque premise of the comic books, and follows a village of Gauls who are fighting to keep their freedom from being invaded by a Roman army, led by Caesar. The villagers' freedom is perpetually upheld by the brave actions of a pint-sized hero called Asterix, who makes up for his diminutive size by being aided by his barrel-bellied cohort, Obelix, and some strength juice concocted by the village's revered druid, Getafix. At the start of the game Caesar has ordered that his men kidnap Getafix to plug the village's supply of protein shakes, and it's here we join the story. Our mission is to help Asterix and Obelix travel to Rome, save Getafix and put a stop to Caesar's plan.

Given the relationship of Asterix and Obelix played such an important element of the comics, Sega was canny to bake a novel tag system into the game, whereby at the start of each stage players were given the choice to control either the game's two main heroes through that section. And it was worth thinking about who you wanted to tackle certain stages with too, because each had their own pros and cons. For example, Obelix's strength enabled him to smash through walls with ease (Asterix has to rely on potions to blow them up), but his extra weight made him less agile.

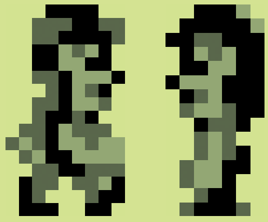
Because of this, the game had real replay value – especially as it featured a large number hidden areas and secrets to discover.

Round all this off with some catchy music and a cheap price tag and, whether you are a fan of the comics or not, you'll be glad you took our advice and got a fix of *Asterix*.

THE CLASSIC GAME



Dude! The total evil De Nomolous wants to change the future, and he's stolen fragments of time and scattered them throughout history. This is most heinous, and has left loads of historical dead dudes hanging about in the wrong time, a situation that they deem to be totally bogus and non-righteous. It's up to our awesome heroes, Bill S Preston, Esquire and Ted 'Theodore' Logan to party on in a most triumphant videogame, and make everything resplendent with the world again. Join retro dude Craig Grannell as he deals with the oddity of Game Boy time travel with the greatest of ease and has a totally excellent adventure! [You're fired – Ed.]

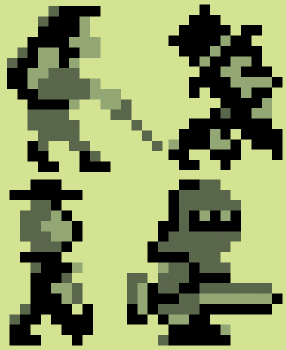


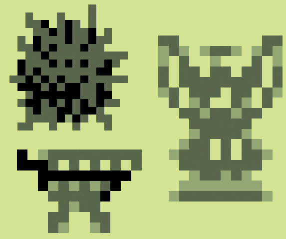
BILL & TED

The stars of the show are Bill S Preston, Esquire and Ted 'Theodore' Logan, and they handle much like someone's taped springs to their shoes and given them the ability to glide. This is just as well when you consider what they have to contend with in order to complete their mission…

ANGRY HISTORICAL DUDES

Napoleon, Einstein, Joan of Arc, Abraham Lincoln, Billy the Kid, Genghis Khan… famous faces from history – and, of course, the *Bill & Ted* films – litter the levels of this game. As in all good retro-style platform games, colliding with a foe – angry historical dude or otherwise – is typically fatal





HAZARDOUS HAZARDS

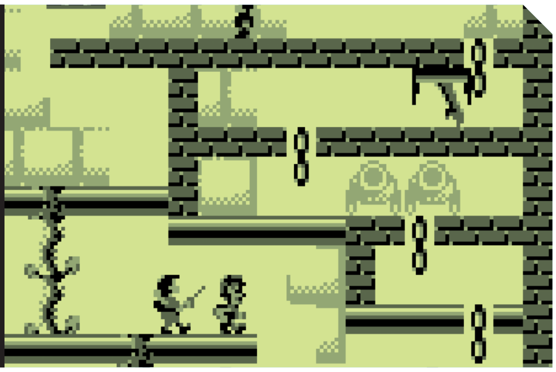
If it wasn't enough that Bill and Ted have to deal with a seemingly unlimited number of angry historical dudes, the scenes are peppered with hazards, from deadly tumbleweeds to a bizarre sentient trolley that chases you around at high speed.

RIGHTEOUS ITEMS

Although most of Bill and Ted's time is taken up with fast-paced platforming action, level design evolves over the course of the game, and you need to make use of various items strewn about the place. These include bombs for blowing up platforms and a gravestone that, oddly, provides limited invulnerability.



WHY IS IT A CLASSIC?



It's most excellent, dude!

This game doesn't look like much, but you're sitting here reading a copy of **Retro Gamer**, which is filled with articles about simple games that just happen to be hugely playable. *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure* could have been an awful arcade adventure – indeed, its equivalents on other platforms were – but Beam instead went retro-crazy, creating a mash-up of *Manic Miner*, *Lode Runner*, *Jumpman* and *Chuckie Egg*, set over dozens of unique, varied stages. If that doesn't appeal to you, you must be reading the wrong magazine. And if that does appeal, things get even better…

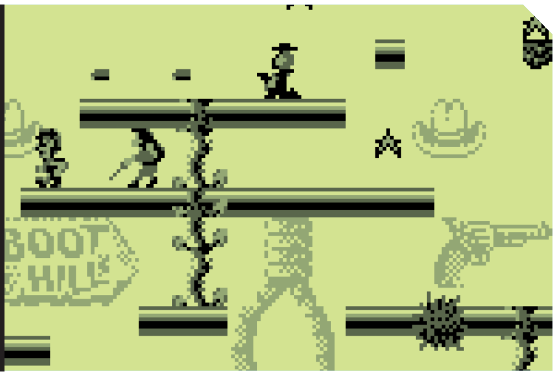
BEST MECHANICS



Non-heinous controls, dude!

A single-screen platform game lives or dies by its controls. Too flexible and the game becomes simple, enabling hardcore gamers to breeze through. Too rigid and the game becomes a frustrating chore. *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure* gets the balance right: the controls are tight, enabling you to nudge a character a pixel at a time when necessary. And when falling through the air, Bill and Ted can 'glide' a little – handy for avoiding foes, but also essential in some of the levels to avoid a totally egregious and heinous death, dude.

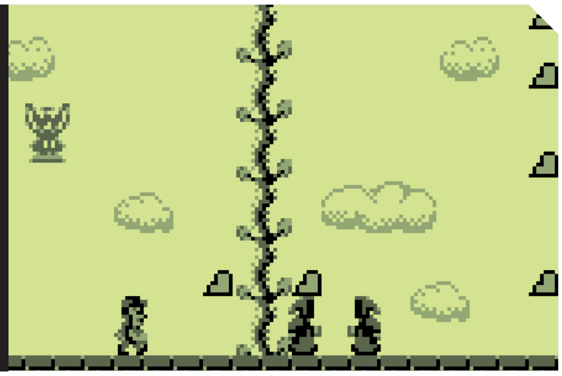
BEST TIME-ZONE



The most excellent Mr The Kid, dude!

There's lots to like about many of the game's 50 screens, set over ten time-zones. It's also great to see that although certain components are common across the entire game, backgrounds change throughout, adding character to what's already a fun game. For our money, New Mexico is perhaps the most fun zone, though. It's relatively easy – bar a nasty tumbleweed on the first screen – so great for time-attack scoring, and the graphic design is lovely. England (crazed knights, castles) and Paradise (dematerialising Death, cunning puzzles) also warrant a mention.

BEST SURPRISE



Triumphant design, dude!

Many retro platform games of this kind spill their guts on the very first screen, after which point you've seen almost everything there is to offer. This one's more in keeping with *Bounty Bob* or *Bubble Bobble*: throughout, new items appear, in the form of question-mark blocks. Some are extra lives, but others provide objects – bombs, balloons, and more – that must be correctly used to progress, adding puzzles to the frantic arcade experience. Later levels also borrow from *Jumpman*, reconfiguring themselves as you grab flashing objects, demanding that you plot a path and learn it to continue.

BEST FEATURE



Password party, dude!

Manic Miner's great, right up until you've played the first 19 screens a billion times but never made it to the 20th. *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure* doesn't make you suffer to the same extent: on reaching a new time-zone, you get a phone number that can be entered in an options screen, enabling you to start from that zone. This means you can master every zone before trying to play right through, and it adds a nod to the film's time-travelling telephone booth, along with providing a quick breather and nice picture as you enter a new zone.

BEST CHECK



Less of the dudes, dude!

The game's called *Bill & Ted's Excellent Game Boy Adventure*, and so it would be a little odd if it didn't feature Bill and Ted. However, Beam realised that this licence was a means to an end. Bill and Ted therefore show up on the title screen with a surprisingly amusing comic-book-style 'instructions' chat, and at the end of each level when the main character under your control switches. Otherwise, this could be any character-based platform game, which means that the gameplay is far more important than the licence – a very good thing. In fact, an excellent thing. [You're fired. Again – Ed.]

What the press said… ages ago

Because this game was criminally ignored by the press at the time – presumably with much gusto for having a retro-gaming bent, as was seemingly law in those days – hours of rummaging through old magazines resulted in us finding one review, from *Power Play*. In German. Here's our attempt to translate some of it:

Power Play 79%

"I love it. Such a game's been absent for years: a simple design, but enormously playable. In higher levels, you can't avoid unforeseen loss of life (for example, if a platform suddenly disappears), but thanks to the passwords, this doesn't matter."

What we think

Maddeningly frustrating. Utterly infuriating. Just two of the fit-to-print opinions we have about this Game Boy title. And yet in the best traditions of classic platformers (*Manic Miner, Chuckie Egg, Lode Runner*), this movie tie-in is also addictive, compelling, fun and – dare we say it? – EXCELLENT! [No, really, you're fired – Ed.]



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** LJN
- » **DEVELOPER:** BEAM SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1991
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5

THE HISTORY OF EXCITEBIKE

This month **Stuart Hunt** takes one of Nintendo's oldest racing series for a spin, and on his travels got to ride pillion with two of the programmers who helped create its exceptional N64 instalment

While *Hang-On* served up the usual shot-burst arcade thrills we'd later come to expect from Sega, Nintendo's earlier take on motorbike racing, despite lacking any kind of interesting hero and narrative, was also typical of its developer's brand of fun, accessible yet innovative videogames. But the similarities between these two racing titles don't end there: were you aware that *Excitebike*'s history also has a link to the arcades? You were? Damn!

Designed by Shigeru Miyamoto and his R&D1 internal development team, and debuting as a launch title for the Famicom in 1984, *Excitebike* was a humble-looking side-scrolling racing game in which players could experience the exhilarating world of motocross. Controlling a little nondescript motocross motorcyclist in white and red leathers, players competed in the completely fantastical Excitebike Championship. Split into three different game modes, dubbed Selection A, Selection B, and Design in the game, *Excitebike*'s first mode saw players competing in a solo race against the clock, and progression resting on reaching the finishing line within a time that would see your little rider place third or higher on the winner's podium. Each course ran for two laps – so essentially looped once – and all were primed with hills and jumps to fly off and obstructions, such as hurdles and gravel pocks, to avoid.





» [FDS] The *Vs Excitebike* games also featured a great little bonus stunt round.



» [Arcade] *Vs Excitebike* featured slightly better graphics and new, gobsmacking animations like this…

Despite its functional visuals and simple gameplay, for its day *Excitebike* actually featured some great presentational touches, from the cameramen on the sidelines capturing the jumpy action to the current session's high score being displayed in-game against the stadium barriers. This subtle layer of depth was also true for the game's distinctive control system.

With all the tracks in the game featuring four lanes, the player could alter their pitch using the y-axis on the D-pad, while the A and B buttons worked as independent accelerators, with the B button offering faster acceleration but at the cost of seeing your bike's engine overheat from exhaustion and losing time as you waited patiently for it to cool down again. A sort of precursor to boost panels, the game's tracks also featured arrows that, when ridden over, would automatically cool the engine down, allowing skilled players to chain long periods of heightened acceleration together. This mechanic helped to bake a subtle sense of strategy into *Excitebike*'s races, and also made it an excellent time-attack game as players tried to beat their best times by eking as much bonus speed from their engine as they could without it cutting out from exhaustion. And there were even more layers to be found in *Excitebike*'s gameplay too, as the position of the bike, the angle and speed at which you took off from ramps, and ensuring that you always landed on both wheels could also help shave seconds off your finishing time.

Excitebike's second mode simply upped the challenge by throwing an endless convoy of computer-controlled bikers into the mix. Ramming into the back of a rival biker would send you spinning off the track, while baiting rival racers to fly into the back of you would do the same to them – but oddly offer very little benefit to the outcome of the race. In both modes players were given the choice to race on any of the five tracks in the game – effectively allowing them to start at any point – but only after first proving their mettle by coming third place or better in a preliminary race on their chosen track.

The final and probably most significant mode that Nintendo added to *Excitebike* was undoubtedly its track editor. Considered to be the earliest example of one ever seen in a home videogame, this mode allowed players to design and race their own tracks and play them solo or with computer competitors, in principle giving the game eternal longevity. In Japan, because of this *Excitebike* was made compatible with the Famicom Data Recorder peripheral, which allowed players to save their tracks on a cassette tape and replay them whenever they wished. However, as the device never found international release, gamers outside Japan were left with no way to save their custom tracks, losing them as soon as they turned off their machines, despite the game giving you the option to save, which is surely rubbing salt into the wound.

Shortly after *Excitebike*'s release in Japan, Nintendo released an arcade version of the game. Titled *Vs Excitebike*, its name came from the fact that it was released on Nintendo's Vs System arcade platform. Prior to the launch of the Famicom in North America, Nintendo was thinking up ways to help generate interest for a new console in the US. Despite the console performing well in Japan, Nintendo felt that many Western gamers were still harbouring anxiety toward games consoles following the console crash of 1983, and so turned its gaze to the profitable arcade market as a way to gently coax them back. Nintendo's plan



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** NINTENDO R&D1, LEFTFIELD PRODUCTIONS, MONSTER GAMES
- » **PLATFORM:** NES, ARCADE, SNES, N64, GBA, WII
- » **RELEASED:** 1984-2010
- » **GENRE:** RACING

» [NES] The original game allows only racing solo or against computer-controlled opponents.







» [Wii] *Excitebots* is by far the oddest instalment in the series. And yes, that is a robotic turtle on four wheels taking a penalty.

TIMELINE

- **EXCITEBIKE**
  Format: NES
  Released: 1984
- **VS EXCITEBIKE**
  Format: Arcade
  Released: 1985
- **VS EXCITEBIKE**
  Format: Famicom Disk System
  Released: 1988
- **BS EXCITEBIKE BUN BUN MARIO BATTLE STADIUM**
  Format: Super Nintendo (Satellaview)
  Released: 1997
- **EXCITEBIKE 64**
  Format: N64
  Released: 2000
- **EXCITEBIKE-E**
  Format: GBA
  Released: 2002



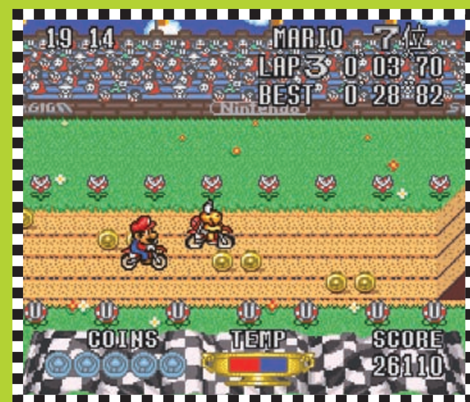
was to design an arcade board based on Famicom technology. Dubbed the Vs System, the boards would allow arcade goers to experience coin-op versions of Famicom games without the need to purchase a console.

The thinking was that those who enjoyed playing Nintendo games in arcades would be more inclined to purchase a NES when they discovered that nigh-on identical versions were available on its new console, and around two dozen early NES titles consequently found an arcade release on the Vs System – many benefiting from slightly better visuals and smoother animation. To the more apathetic gamer, however, these differences would be negligible and, as such, the NES would be perceived to be offering arcade-faithful versions of these arcade games.

Vs Excitebike (simply titled *Excitebike* on its splash screen) did differ in some ways to the original release, though. The arcade game featured no track editor, but did boast smoother animation and marginally crisper visuals. It also included a neat Evel Knievel-style bonus stage in which players jumped over trucks to earn bonus points – the only version of the game to ever feature this bonus. The way players progressed through the game also differed, with seven tracks to tackle – two more than the NES version – and players racing one lap of each track solo, only needing to come in fifth place to qualify, and then race two laps of the same track against computer competitors. *Vs Excitebike* also restricted the original game's track selection, only permitting players to start from the second and third tracks, denoted by choosing between three difficulty levels at the start of the game.

Excitebike became one of the bestselling launch titles for the Famicom, and its success in Japan even saw it ported to obscure Japanese computers like the NEC PC88 and Sharp X1 courtesy of Hudson Soft. So, with the game's popularity sealed, and Nintendo's Famicom Disk System add-on two years into its release, Nintendo understandably saw *Excitebike* as another of its esteemed titles to add to the Disk System catalogue. Released exclusively on the ill-fated disk format, *Vs Excitebike* was a home iteration of the arcade game. However, to consider it an straight arcade port is a bit of a misrepresentation, as it actually features new game modes that weren't present in the arcade version. While 'Original Excite' was basically just the seven-track arcade version of the game – complete with the truck-jumping bonus round – two new modes also appeared. The first, Vs Edit, made great use of the storage capacity of Famicom disks, allowing users to finally design and save up to four track slots straight onto the disk, while Vs Excite was the most notable as it finally gave two players the chance to go head-to-head in either a battle or free race in the game.

In keeping with *Excitebike*'s odd connection with being released on short-lived and little-known Nintendo hardware, the next game in the *Excitebike* series is regarded as a bit of a lost Nintendo classic. Released on the Satellaview, a modem and download service for the Super Nintendo that only found release in Japan, *Mario Excite Bike* – or, to give it its full, ridiculous and proper title, *BS Excitebike Bun Bun Mario Battle Stadium* – was a colourful download-only SNES title released in 1997 that blended together the worlds





» [FDS] The original NES version featured a track editor but no way for users to save their designs without purchase of a costly add-on. You could argue that the FDS version didn't remedy that all that much.



EXCITEBIKE CLASSIC NES SERIES
Format: GBA
Released: 2004



EXCITE TRUCK
Format: Wii
Released: 2006



EXCITEBOTS: TRICK RACING
Format: Wii
Released: 2009



EXCITEBIKE: WORLD RALLY
Format: WiiWare
Released: 2009



of *Super Mario Kart* and *Excitebike* to great effect. Sharing more DNA with *Excitebike* than *Mario Kart*, the game substituted the nondescript racers from the original with well-known Mario characters, and the game itself played exactly like the original *Excitebike* with just a few minor differences.

After selecting your character, players are given an undisclosed amount of time with which to complete a certain number of laps of a stage. With this section complete, it then throws competitors into the mix with a race to the finish line, complete with *SMK*'s annoying elastic band physics. Perhaps the most notable tweak made to the *Excitebike* gameplay in *Mario Excite Bike* is the addition of gold coins in the races. At points in the track, clusters of coins can be found, and if five coins are collected players are awarded unlimited engine coolant, allowing them to thrash the hell out of their motorbike until they crash without fear of seeing it overheat. While the mechanic does make the game a lot easier, as well as toning down that nice sense of strategy from the original, it still proves an enjoyable addition to the gameplay and offers a slightly different approach to the game, which fans will likely welcome.

As the BS games were made download only, it was quite common for Nintendo to release the games in parts, and *Mario Excite Bike* is no exception. Four versions of the game were released, with each simply adding a new track and playable character. Though obscure, the *Bun Bun* games prove great additions to the series and thankfully are available for fans to experience through the magic of emulation. But it beggars belief why the four parts didn't just get bundled together on a SNES cart and released into retailers. The game would have undoubtedly proven to be another SNES classic, of that we are sure.

Following the sly release of *Mario Excite Bike* in Japan, Nintendo would then decide to eke even more mileage from the original NES game when it released two versions of the game on the Game Boy Advance. Marking the first and only time that the series has gone portable, the first GBA release would once again appear on another obscure piece of Nintendo hardware, namely the Nintendo e-Reader – which only saw release in Japan and North America – and the second was part of Nintendo's Classic NES Series.

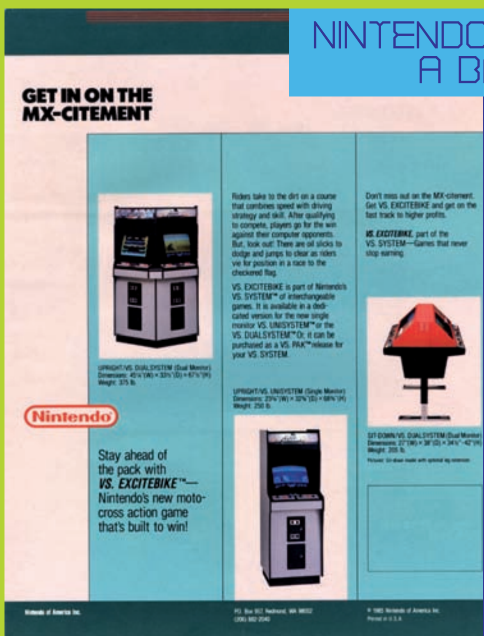
The e-Reader cards were essentially just a GBA version of the Sega Cards released for the Sega Master System. When scanned into your GBA using the e-Reader add-on, the cards would unlock items, levels and secrets in certain games. A small selection of NES titles were also released on the device, and *Excitebike* – or rather *Excitebike-e*, as it was dubbed – was one of them.

So to all but a small handful of people in Japan, it seemed like *Excitebike*'s legacy had ended with the NES, with many fans unaware that Nintendo had returned to the series on the Super NES. Thus many were surprised when the company announced that a brand new *Excitebike* game would be appearing on the N64, some 16 years after the release of the first game.

Excitebike 64 was the first true successor to *Excitebike* – a game that wasn't a spin-off, or a revision, but a true sequel. Regarded as a triumph, *Excitebike 64* dazzled N64 owners when it was released thanks to its great balance of simulator and arcade racing, satisfying physics and smorgasbord of game options. The game was developed by a small California-based studio called Left Field Productions, which was founded by industry veterans Mike Lamb, Jeff Godfrey and John Brandwood, and among its staff was a mixture of US and UK talent.

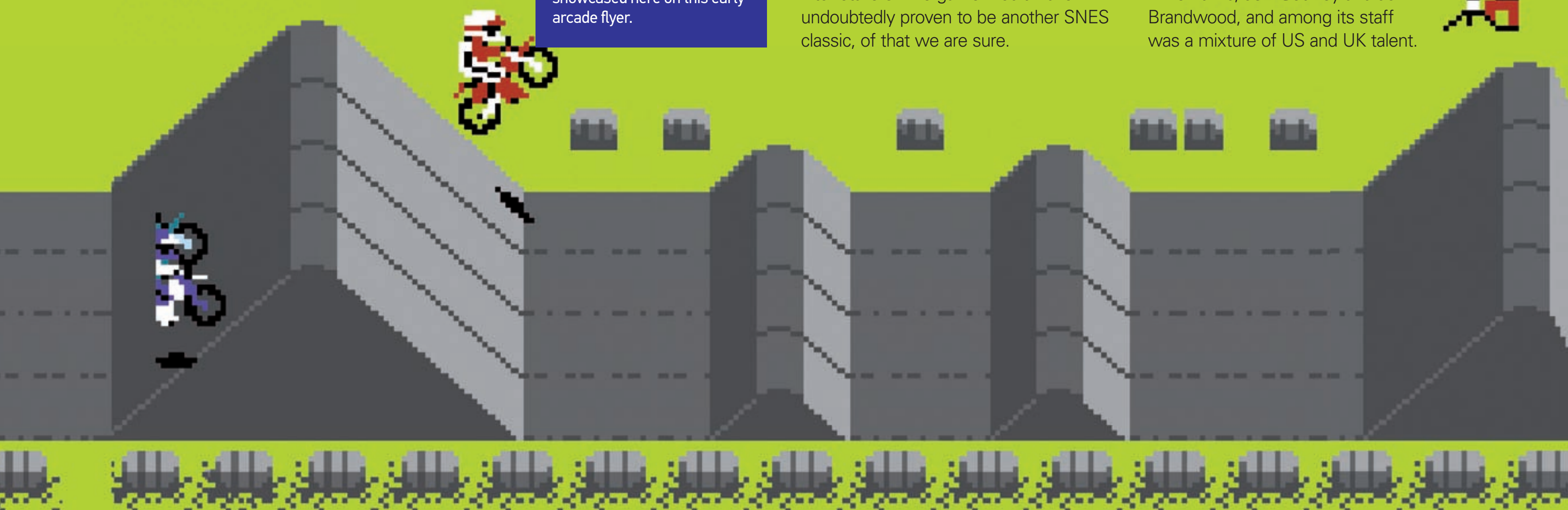


NINTENDO VS SYSTEM: A BRIEF HISTORY



» An original Vs System cabinet, particularly the rare DualSystem version, remains an uncommon item in the collections of even the most ardent Nintendo fan.

As we touched on in the article, a number of popular Nintendo games, including *Duck Hunt*, *Dr Mario*, *Punch-Out!!* and *Super Mario Bros*, found their way to Nintendo's Vs System arcade format. The hardware, which launched in 1985, was based on Famicom technology with the purpose that Nintendo could easily transfer its early NES titles to the arcades, thus the Vs System can be seen as the precursor to Nintendo's more popular PlayChoice and PlayChoice-10 arcade formats. Nintendo released a few different iterations of the Vs System, such as the hard-to-come-by DualSystem, which came in upright and sit-down versions, and the UniSystem – so called because the Duals featured two monitors while the Unis only featured one. If you squint really hard into a magnifying glass you can see the three different variations showcased here on this early arcade flyer.



LITTLE-KNOWN NES RACERS

We've no doubt that most of you are familiar with Excitebike, but here are a few NES racing titles that you might not be as familiar with

MACH RIDER

■ **Developer:** Nintendo ■ **Year:** 1985



Also finding release on Nintendo's Vs System arcade board, this into-the-screen motorbike racing shoot-'em-up hybrid plays very similarly to Sega's *Hang-On* series. Like *Excitebike*, it featured a series of different play modes including a 'battle course', which tasked players with driving around blasting all and sundry; endurance races saw players racing to reach a certain distance within a time limit; and even a track designer. It also came packed with a story, albeit a loose one – something about a guy on a motorcycle who looks like an American quarterback embarking on a road trip to destroy things called Quadrunners. Given the strong resemblance of the game's hero Mach to Captain Falcon – more visible in the Vs iteration of the game – and the similar futuristic setting and perspective, the game is also considered to be a precursor to *F-Zero*.

RAD RACER

■ **Developer:** Square ■ **Year:** 1987



Designed by a few of the guys at Square who were responsible for bringing *Final Fantasy* to the world, *Rad Racer* (aka *Highway Star*) was the NES's answer to *OutRun*, a glorious-looking checkpoint racer that scrolled towards the player at a blistering pace. As a result of it being one of the slickest racers on the console, the game became a popular game for the NES, particularly in North America following that famous scene in the film *The Wizard* in which a kid with bad hair plays the game using the Power Glove – despite the fact that the Power Glove ultimately proved as responsive a control device as a solar-powered dead parrot. In Japan the game was also compatible with the extremely obscure Famicom 3D System – basically a pair of 3D goggles – while the rest of the world had to make do with a pair of cheapo cardboard ones instead.

F-1 RACE

■ **Developer:** Nintendo ■ **Year:** 1984



If *Mach Rider* is the NES version of Sega's *Hang-On*, and *Rad Racer* is basically *OutRun*, *F-1 Race* is clearly Nintendo's stab at replicating Namco's *Pole Position*. This decent NES racer by Gunpei Yokoi is a challenging game that would spawn an oddball series of sequels. The series received two Famicom Disk System spin-offs, including *Famicom Grand Prix: F-1 Race*, and the odd-sounding *Famicom Grand Prix II: 3D Hot Rally*, which also made use of the Famicom 3D System. Both FDS games were compatible with the Disk Fax, a weird add-on that allowed sad people to fax off their high scores to Nintendo. The original NES iteration was later ported over to the monochrome screen of the Game Boy, where it gained most success and popularity thanks to it being boxed with the handheld's Four Player Adapter add-on and featuring various cameos of popular Nintendo characters.

"As a developer, there are few things more stressful than having Miyamoto critique your work!"

The relationship that led to this long-awaited sequel was actually struck way before a new *Excitebike* game was even considered by Nintendo. After finishing the PSone basketball title *Slam 'N' Jam*, Left Field began work on a new ice hockey simulator. However, early on into the game's production the project was cancelled. Not wanting to waste the progress that it had made on the project so far, the decision was made to put the assets into a new basketball demo and then pitch it out to a few publishers. Impressed by what it saw, Nintendo eventually picked up the project and the N64 basketball sim *Kobe Bryant In NBA Courtside* was the result. It also took an investment share in the company, making Left Field an exclusive developer for Nintendo. When *Courtside* then went on to sell well for the console, Nintendo went back to Left Field to ask what project the team would like to work on next. After bouncing a few ideas around inside the company, Left Field eventually pitched the idea of a motocross game for the N64.

"Well, when we started work on the game, there was no mention of *Excitebike* at all," reveals programmer Ben Stragnell, who had joined Left Field from the UK just prior to the *NBA Courtside* project. "As far as we were concerned, we were just trying to make a really fun motocross game. We actually started out with a much more realistic physics-based game, and just found ourselves naturally moving toward a more 'fun' style. The ability to slightly steer the bikes in the air, for instance, is completely unrealistic, but made the game much more playable. I think that not initially knowing that the game was going to have the *Excitebike* name attached to it was probably liberating for us. We were free to just make a fun game, without trying to capture a specific look and feel. Once we were a good distance into the project, the possibility of Nintendo being willing to attach the *Excitebike* name came to light. This was something that Miyamato himself would have to agree to, and so we had a meeting with him. As a game developer, there are few things more stressful than having Miyamoto play and critique your work! As I recall, we got off fairly lightly – he was generally pleased with how the game was shaping up, and had only a few suggestions to offer."

With Nintendo now agreeing to attach the *Excitebike* name to the project, the pressure on Left Field was immediately amplified, but then so was the enthusiasm felt towards the project by the team.

"It was a huge deal for Left Field," remembers programmer Sam Baker,





» [N64] It might look brown and muggy, but don't let that put you off – *Excitebike 64* is one of the best games in the *Excitebike* series. Just ask IGN.



» [Wii] The vehicles may have doubled their wheels, but the excitement and essence of the series remain in *Excite Truck*.

who joined the company from the UK a few months into development. "It was something we were all really enthusiastic about and obviously it was a franchise with a big fan base and lots of potential. A *Kobe Bryant* sequel had guaranteed sales but the fun project, from my point of view, was *Excitebike*."

Having already set out to make the best motocross racing game it could, and with one successful N64 sports title already under its belt, the team knew it could deliver a game that would live up to the series' bloodline and once again meet Nintendo's high expectations.

"Nintendo is a relatively hands-off company. They place a lot of trust in external developers to do the right thing," says Stragnell when asked whether Nintendo's involvement in the game changed once the *Excitebike* name was attached. "We'd established a pretty good working relationship with them on *NBA Courtside*, and so I think we were both happy to maintain the status quo. We continued to work with our previous producers at Nintendo, and they offered us a lot of feedback and suggestions – but I think most of the look and style came from Left Field."

Though Ben had got fairly comfortable with the inner workings of the N64 through his time working on *NBA Courtside*, there were still a number of programming hurdles that the team had to jump. And most of these concerned the game's frame rate.

"Fitting a game into the available RAM and maintaining a good frame rate are always challenges – no matter what platform you're developing on, or what game you're writing," says Stragnell. "I had to completely rewrite our 3D engine and tools because the rendering requirements were so different from our previous game. In order to make the game nice and fast, I also had to impose quite a few restrictions on the level design. This made the designers' work difficult, but they rose to the challenge."

Despite taking a giant leap from 8-bit 2D side-scrolling racer to 64-bit 3D polygon-pushing, *Excitebike 64* still managed to capture the spirit of the original game. As well as mirroring the original's great visuals, track design, controls and OTT physics, there were also a clutch of excellent game modes for players to get stuck in to. The main game was split into three parts: Time Trial, Exhibition, and a Season mode that saw riders working their way through 20 tracks, gradually unlocking them as they go. There was also the welcome return of a level editor, and Stragnell even found time to program a bespoke NES emulator for the game so that a copy of the original NES game could be bundled in as an unlockable.

And the good aspects of the game just continued, with *Excitebike 64* becoming the first game in the series to have a heavier emphasis on stunts, as well as an excellent multiplayer mode that allowed up to four players to battle it out in the game's Exhibition mode or on a series of party game-style Special Tracks. Comprising the games Uphill Climb, Desert, Soccer and Stunt Course, the Special Tracks proved a popular addition, serving as a nice diversion from the standard racing.

Excitebike 64 also made use of the N64's Expansion Pak, a small add-on that slotted into the top of the N64 to give it a further 4MB of memory. Stragnell explains how the team made use of the extra memory: "The N64 was a nice machine, although it did have a number of fairly brutal limitations, the texture cache being the most problematic. I'd learned a fair amount from working on the *NBA Courtside* engine, and so by the end of *EB64* we were pushing the hardware a lot more effectively. We did support the 4MB Expansion Pak, although it was entirely optional. The extra memory allowed us to support hi-res mode. Unfortunately, it didn't make the rendering hardware any faster, so there was a frame rate penalty. I personally preferred to play the game in standard res for this reason."

Excitebike was highly praised by most reviewers on its release, with



THE BASICS

Our indispensable guide showing you three measly ways to help shave valuable seconds off your best time in *Excitebike* and impress your friends – like they would care.



Listen to the game
Using eyeballs to keep tabs on your rising temperature gauge can be distracting. Thankfully, Nintendo has it covered – just listen out for your engine, which will start whining when it's seconds away from overheating.



Watch your landing
The orientation of your bike is vital. Always ensure that you land with both wheels hitting the ground, which will help ensure the best possible acceleration when coming out of a landing.



Memorise speed arrows
These handy panels, which appear on the track, will automatically cool down your engine on contact. Memorise where they appear on the tracks to help ensure that you hit as many as possible.

"The series has always proved important in generating interest for Nintendo consoles"

many hailing the game as an impressive achievement that breathed new life into the franchise. Indeed, the game currently has a score of 9.7 on IGN, one of the highest ever awarded by the games website.

"The feedback was interesting," remembers Baker. "We did get some great reviews – IGN, for example. Some reviewers didn't appreciate the gameplay as much as I did, which of course is disappointing. Then we got feedback from Nintendo when we met with them at E3 following the release. That was the first time I met with Miyamoto, and it was a little bizarre. He was in a meeting with us and he was very clear that the game lacked the kind of reward that they'd implemented in *Super Mario 64*, where Mario dances around with a camera pan each time he finds a star. He felt that was important and that seemed to be the main focus of the meeting. He didn't think our race results screen provided enough drama. To be fair, I'm pretty sure we had a fist pump and a camera pan around the winning racer at the end of the race, but it definitely wasn't considered adequate."

Despite the game's lack of a colourful celebration screen showing your rider jumping for joy and spinning on his head, it's clear that Nintendo was pleased with the critical and commercial response to the game. With Left Field having successfully revived the franchise for both an old and new generation of gamers, Nintendo then set about keeping it at the fore to stop it from fading back into obscurity. In 2002, however, Left Field decided to part ways with Nintendo, buying back the publisher's stake in the company to work on multiformat software.

Looking for a new developer to take the reins, Nintendo enlisted the help of another US indie developer, Monster Games, to develop an '*Excite*' launch title for the Wii. The title was to be released alongside the console's North American release and make use of the console's novel motion-sensor controls.

Monster Games' previous output consisted entirely of racing titles, so given that it was the studio's bread and butter, it is little surprise that *Excite Truck* proved to be another fantastic addition to the series – one that would expand it into other areas of racing, transforming the franchise from just lonely old *Excitebike* into the '*Excite*' series.

But it would also be a fair assumption that Nintendo had far more input into this project than it had previously with *Excitebike 64*, owing to the *Mario 64*-style nature of its gameplay, which saw players racing against the clock to collect up a set number of stars to unlock new trucks and tracks in the game.

But despite the aberrant switch from bikes to trucks, a move from confined raceways to more organic-feeling racetracks, and an all new star-collecting/grading mechanic, the game remained true to *Excitebike*'s heritage. *Excite Truck* featured a number of game modes as well as a number of references to the original NES game. It included the return of the boost/overheating mechanic, as well as the helpful cooling spots on the track, represented in this game by pockets of water, and the orientation of the trucks in the air was also important, with players trying to land on four wheels and time boosts before a jump to afford added height. And while *Excite Truck* didn't feature a track editor per se, the game did feature power-ups that allowed players to deform the terrain in the middle of races.

Given the success of *Excite Truck*, a sequel was inevitable. So where was Nintendo to go next with the franchise? *Excite Plane*? *Excite Truck 2*? *Excite Boat*? *Excite Bike*? Wait, hang on…

Well, the answer was one that no sane person would have seen coming: robot vehicles themed on animals and insects. Thankfully opting to go with







SIMILAR GAMES

Love Excitebike? Then here are a few more titles that might be of interest to you



Joe Danger

Help the game's titular daredevil make his comeback to the world of stunt racing in this stunning love letter to retro games. Boasting a great art style, tons of replay value and some great track designs, this is an impressive debut by indie developer Hello Games.



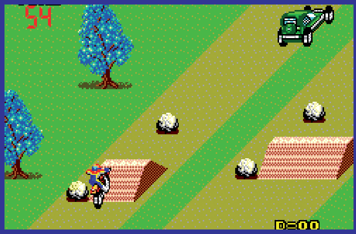
Kikstart II

Thanks to its mix of great visuals, addictive gameplay, split-screen racing and a life-consuming construction kit, Shaun Southern's *Kikstart* sequel became the most popular motorbike racing game on microcomputers in Eighties England.



Trials HD

RedLynx's glorious-looking XBLA title is all about timing, quick reflexes and skill. Rather than just race to the checkpoint, players must complete a series of challenging obstacle-strewn courses in as fast a time – and with as small a number of 'faults' – as possible.



Enduro Racer

Perhaps noting the popularity that *Excitebike* was gaining on the NES, Sega transformed its sprite-scaling dirt bike coin-op *Enduro Racer* into an isometric racing game for its Master System version. The result is a game that isn't as good but is still pretty playable.

» [Wii] WiiWare release *Excitebike: World Rally* is one of the more orthodox sequels to the NES original.



the title of *Excitebots: Trick Racing*, rather than the suspect-sounding *Excite Creature-Themed Robot Vehicles*, the game proved to be another excellent addition to the series, but one clearly with younger gamers in mind. Developed again by Monster Games, *Excitebots* retained the same look and controls of *Excite Truck* but differed mainly by substituting the star-collecting with players having to perform tricks, stunts and various mini-games during races. It sounds absolutely batty, but somehow, thanks to the game wrapping all these elements up in a sensible scoring system, it all comes together, and there's even an added element of *Super Mario Kart*-style combat racing too thanks to a host of offensive power-ups that can be used to give you the edge over your rivals during races. While certainly the most left-field title in the canon – no pun intended – *Excitebots* maintained the series' impeccable record for quality and is once again considered a great addition to the series. Unfortunately, though, the game has yet to be released in Europe, so it's likely that only keen importers will have experienced it.

The final entry in the *Excitebike* series so far saw Nintendo and Monster Games redress the balance a little with a title that harked right back to the original 1984 game. Released as a downloadable game on WiiWare, and featuring a familiar top-down perspective and dual acceleration control system, *Excitebike: World Rally* marked a return to the time-trial racing of old. In fact, perhaps the only thing that Monster Games carries over from its previous *Excite* titles to *World Rally* is the grading system, which here finds players progressing to the next race by achieving a certain rank rather than a time – though it's the exact same principle – and the real-life setting for the racetracks. Apart from that, this was just a decent revamping of the original *Excitebike* that makes use of the Wii's motion controls.

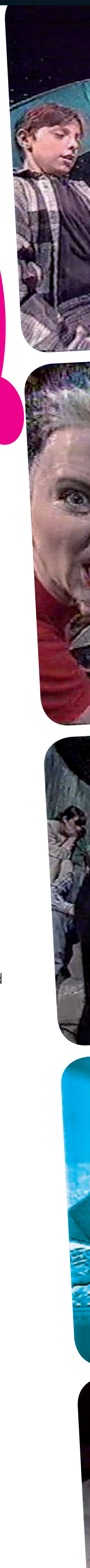
So that about sums up our retrospective look at the *Excitebike* series. While it's a franchise that has never been held in quite the same esteem by Nintendo as its other racing titles such as *Super Mario Kart* or *F-Zero*, the *Excite* games have always proved important for Nintendo in helping it generate interest in its consoles. The original game proved a popular launch title for the NES, and its eventual sequel went on to become one of the best exclusive racing titles for the N64. The series most recently provided an important launch title for the Wii in North America, and despite its confusing lineage and wildly differing styles and approaches between games, we're sure that Nintendo's purest racing series will continue to play a significant role for the company's consoles for many more games to come.



» [SNES] Released exclusively in Japan for the Satellaview, the humorously titled *BS Excitebike Bun Bun Mario Battle Stadium* brought the worlds of *Excitebike* and *Super Mario Kart* together, with great results.

BAD influence!

What do you get when you mix Edd the Duck's best mate, a feisty female with spiky hair, and a man in a shed handing out gaming cheats? Damien McFerran adjusts the dial on his trusty Trinitron to find out



When you're next down the local watering hole conversing with like-minded friends about the merits of videogame-based televisual programming, you can bet that the name *GamesMaster* will punctuate the discourse at some point. Channel 4's seminal show was something of a trend-setter when it came to transporting our humble hobby from dark, smelly bedrooms and to the more mainstream comforts of the living room, but it's often forgotten that another show covering the same subject matter emerged during the same period and arguably did a much better job at educating its viewers about the latest developments in the medium – and beyond.

Concocted at Yorkshire Televison, *Bad Influence* was the brainchild of producer Patrick Titley and was borne out of another show he'd worked on with the BBC. "In 1981 the BBC's Continuing Education department decided that something should be done to make the nation more computer-literate," he recalls. "A series was planned but there was a problem: the home computers available at that time all used different operating systems and different versions of the programming language BASIC. So the producers hit on an idea that only a large publicly funded corporation, full of confidence and big ideas, could contemplate. The BBC decided to write a specification for their own brand microcomputer and get existing UK manufacturers to bid to make it. The launch of the BBC Micro was timed to coincide with the start of the first TV series of the Computer Literacy Project: *The Computer Programme*. My involvement with the project started a year later, working on the second TV series, which was called *Making The Most Of The Micro*. I then suggested that we do a one-off special live version, so people could phone in with problems. This was called *Making The Most Of The Micro Live* and, in turn, that generated a spin-off series with the title shortened to *Micro Live*. During the run of *Micro Live* I got promoted to producer. I then made another couple of series and got a job at Yorkshire Television in Leeds as a senior producer in the children's department. Part of my job was to come up with programme ideas and I'd noticed that computer games had recently become more popular. Also, I'd always been most interested in the entertainment side of computers on *Micro Live*, but it was difficult to get entertainment ideas on, as it was supposed to be educational."

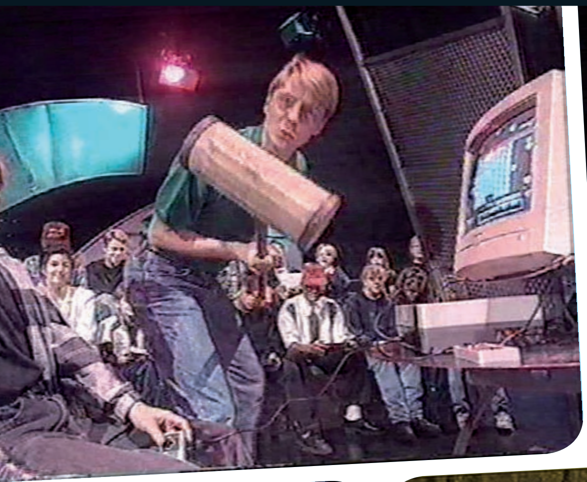
Titley's idea would eventually bloom into a fully formed proposal, given the working title '*Deep Techies*'. "The title came from *Micro Live* producer David Allen's name for the TV engineers who helped us make the computers work in the studio," explains Titley. "Because I intended that we would cover more than just games on the show and I thought it was a funny phrase – and, in truth, I couldn't think of a name – I put it on the proposal." The eventual name for the show was the result of a brainstorming session, and Titley is quick to point out that the negative connotations of the title were not to be taken at all seriously. "One day Richard Maude – who was the assistant producer on the programme – came in and suggested '*Bad Influence*'. I liked it straight away because it sounded slightly dangerous and it reflected the ridiculous idea that games have a negative impact on kids. We were going for irony, just to be clear!"

> **"We were going for irony with the programme's title, just to be clear!"**

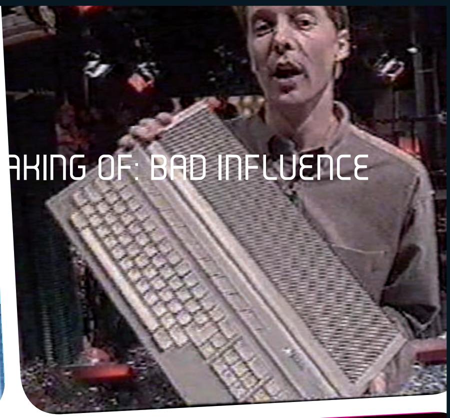
With the show commissioned, the next step was to recruit presenters, and the decision was made to aim for a combination of experience and largely untested raw talent. "I was approached by Patrick and asked if I'd like to get involved," recalls Andy Crane, who had previously gained considerable fame as the occupier of the Children's BBC 'Broom Cupboard' alongside the legendary puppet Edd the Duck. "I loved the idea of a technology programme for kids and said yes straight away."

It's fairly obvious that Crane was chosen more for the experience he brought to the role rather than his affection for videogaming, which he readily admits: "I got myself a Game Boy and enjoyed a few classics, but I was never games crazy. I was more interested in the technology." *Bad Influence* would give Crane ample opportunity to indulge this curiosity, as the show would often look outside the world of games and investigate cutting-edge developments in all kinds of technological areas.

However, the other presenter most definitely had gaming in her blood. "I was really into computers and console games, so when I heard there was a kids' videogames show in the pipeline I knew I wanted to work on it," says Violet Berlin. Like a typical gamer, she saw massive benefits in such a role: "For one thing, I knew I'd get free games and if you think games are expensive now they were proportionally













» Being a show set in the early Nineties, *Bad Influence* naturally featured the obligatory appearance by members of the *Gladiators* cast.



» Donna Air – then famous for being part of the cast of *Byker Grove* – tries to bring some glamour to the world of VR.



FROM A TO ZEE

■ One of *Bad Influence*'s most memorable segments – for the first three series, at least – was the special report from America by the hip and happening US correspondent Z Wright, so called because his mother had a massive family and insisted that when Z was born, he would be the last addition to the brood. Wright would investigate all manner of fascinating subjects and even got to chat with developers such as Shiny Interactive. His roving eye wasn't just confined to videogames, either – Wright also got to visit Industrial Light & Magic at a time when the company was providing the special effects for movies like *Jurassic Park* and *Terminator 2* and was notoriously secretive of its work. Well-versed in street slang and always decked out in the coolest clothes, Wright's purpose on the show was clearly to give a sense of being cutting edge but, ironically, the words spewing forth from his mouth originated on the opposite side of the Atlantic – Titley and his team wrote the scripts for Wright's portion of the show. Wright was dropped from the fourth series and effectively replaced by Violet Berlin, whose Stateside reports covered similar subjects.



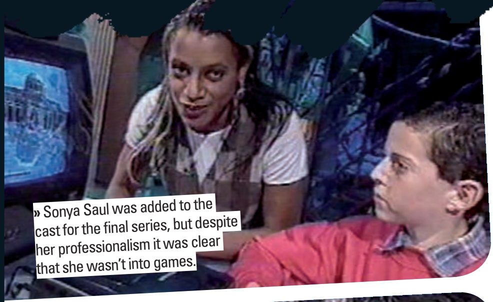








BAD INFLUENCE



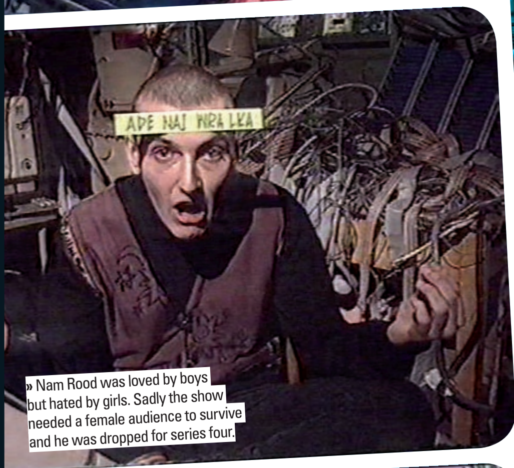
» Sonya Saul was added to the cast for the final series, but despite her professionalism it was clear that she wasn't into games.



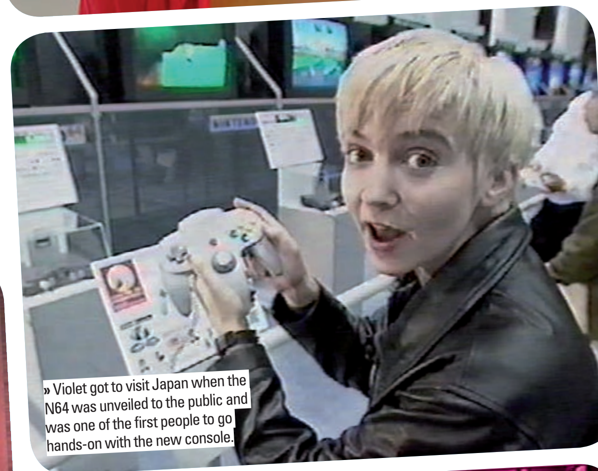
» The title sequence for the first two series was created by Gremlin Graphics.



» Violet Berlin now runs production company WhizzBang TV with her partner Gareth Jones – aka Gaz Top.



» Nam Rood was loved by boys but hated by girls. Sadly the show needed a female audience to survive and he was dropped for series four.



» Violet got to visit Japan when the N64 was unveiled to the public and was one of the first people to go hands-on with the new console.



» Videogame legend Peter Molyneux drops in to the *Bad Influence* studio to demonstrate *Magic Carpet* on the PC.







» *Bad Influence* scored a major coup when it was the first show to display *Mortal Kombat* – less than two hours before *GamesMaster* did the same.

POINTS OF REVIEW

■ While *GamesMaster* called upon the likes of *Mean Machines'* Julian Rignall to offer an opinion on the week's newest games, *Bad Influence* selected kids from the audience, and the resultant reviews were predictably iffy. However, producer Patrick Titley contests that the choice was a wise one, given the context. "People connected because they were watching kids the same age doing the reviews," he insists. "Of course they weren't as slick and witty as the reviewers on *GamesMaster*, but they were real and their opinions were real. And to reiterate: it was a show for children, so of course we had kids on the show. We worked very hard to make sure they played the game a lot before coming to an opinion. Most of the time what they said chimed with the mainstream reviews – but occasionally our kids would hate a game that was highly rated elsewhere and vice versa. I think some adult reviewers simply didn't understand what kids would like or dislike."

Presenter Andy Crane shares a similar sentiment. "Why have professional journalists from print magazines who have already had their say elsewhere when you can have kids who actually buy the games and have to pay to play them?"





» *Bad Influence* attracted some famous faces, including pop sensations Take That, who dropped by to play Sega's *Virtua Racing*.







» Nam Rood – real name Andy Wear – has been a regular cast member on TV show *The Royal* since it began, starring alongside one half of Nineties comedy duo Hale and Pace.











even more expensive then." However, she wasn't as wet behind the ears as many people have been led to believe over the years, having cut her teeth in smaller industry roles prior to accepting the position on *Bad Influence*: "I had been a TV researcher and presenter for about a year on live weekend shows on early satellite television, plus I'd presented a wildlife show for CBBC, so I had experience in both areas."

Committing the show to film was a weekly affair. Whereas other entertainment programmes recorded episodes back-to-back and merely spread them out over a few weeks, *Bad Influence* needed to be filmed as close to the transmission date as possible because it would be featuring the latest news and reviews from the gaming world. "It was a weekly turnaround per show, though we pre-filmed some location items," explains Titley. "Most episodes had just one pre-filmed feature, although some had two. The week's schedule ran like this: Friday: planning meeting for next week's show and general production; Monday: general production and rehearse games reviews; Tuesday: outside rehearsal; Wednesday: shoot in studio; Thursday: edit and transmit that week's show. Then it all started again on Friday." Because the show had hordes of children on-set, special consideration had to be taken when it came to scheduling the recording. "The audience would come into the studio after school and we'd have a limited time to get it all down on tape," recalls Berlin.

"Sometimes it was a bit tight," adds Crane. "Depending how well we remembered our lines and how well the PCs worked."

One of the show's regular segments was devoted to cheat expert Nam Rood (Door Man spelt backwards). This unpleasant character would loiter in his dingy shed dispensing tips and tricks to the masses – whom he lovingly referred to as "furtlers" – and was brought to life by actor Andy Wear.

"Nam arrived fully formed," reveals Titley. "The week before the first recording I realised we needed two things: a way to do cheats, and a self-contained comedy segment to liven up the duller [shows]. Nam Rood was really invented by Andy, who fleshed out the thin and only occasionally funny scripts." And the origin of furtling? "*Micro Live* producer David Allen invented the verb 'to furtle' – which is what deep techies do – and it became enshrined in Nam's cry of 'Hello, spotty furtlers!'"

Given that it was running concurrently with Channel 4's *GamesMaster*, it might be fair to assume that there was some degree of rivalry between the two shows. Both Crane and Berlin are adamant that the two programmes were aimed at very different audiences, and while Titley agrees, he hints that some one-upmanship may have occurred. "There was one magical Thursday when *GamesMaster* had done an exclusive deal to show the first ever TV footage of the brand new *Mortal Kombat* and we managed to acquire an advance copy and showed it on TV an hour and a half before them," says Titley with a smile. "I understand they were a bit cross, especially since they'd been heavily trailing their exclusive access all week."

Bad Influence wasn't just concerned with interactive entertainment, though. The show regularly dabbled in other areas of technology, investigating topics as varied as choreographing a ballet using a piece of software and uncovering the latest developments in voice-recognition technology, all of which led the show to be dubbed '*Tomorrow's World* for kids' in some sectors of the media. "It was an ITV mainstream children's programme and so by rights it needed to have lots of content in it," elaborates Titley when asked to explain why this was the case. "We covered other technology because just looking at a computer screen isn't very visually interesting and the real world is fascinating, and also because I was interested in the way computers were changing the world."

Almost from day one *Bad Influence* was a massive success, attracting millions of viewers each week. One key reason for this achievement was that unlike the double-entendre-laden *GamesMaster*, *Bad Influence* appealed as much to girls as it did to boys.

"The real triumph – at least for the first three series – was that the split between female and male viewers was practically 50/50," says Berlin. "If the show had been really successful but had only appealed to boys then that would have put it in jeopardy, because ITV was – and still is – a mainstream channel and wasn't allowed to appeal to niche audiences. For me the biggest triumph is even though computers are a traditionally male subject, we got girls watching too. That makes me proud."

For Berlin it was particularly pleasing as she initially found her role to be quite demanding, given the dominance of men in the videogame industry. "I felt a bit like a freak quite a lot of the time, an outsider, an 'other' – a girl who would rather play videogames than go shopping. But since that time I've had emails from girls – who are obviously now women – who said that I was a role model for them getting into computers or games design. That's very reassuring."

Audience figures grew at a record-breaking rate throughout series two, and although there was a dip during series three – which boasted a new title sequence and studio unfortunately inspired by the legendary gaming dud *Rise Of The Robots* – for its first three series *Bad Influence* was the most popular show on Children's ITV in terms of viewing figures. Series four would feature some bold changes, however. Sonya Saul was employed as co-presenter with Crane in the studio while Berlin was allowed to do more on-location visits and host her own 'Virtual Violet' segment. The alterations didn't go down well with many audience members, with Saul's obvious lack of interest in the subject matter sticking out like a sore thumb. Titley feels that the changes were unavoidable. "You have to remember that *Bad Influence* was a mainstream show on ITV," he explains. "We had to attract a mainstream audience, not just geeks. Sonya was a good studio presenter, though admittedly she knew less about games than Violet. Violet was excellent on location and we also used her to do comment pieces that she wrote and produced. At the time it seemed like a good move and I suspect the audience would have dropped whatever we'd done."

Another casualty was Nam Rood, who was completely absent from the fourth series. "Nam was omitted because we lost audience on series three, which was probably inevitable as series two had broken records," says Titley. "Not enough girls were watching and our research showed than Nam was less popular amongst girls, so put all that together and you get a new female studio presenter to free Violet to do what she did best and Nam gets the elbow."

Viewing figures for the fourth series continued the slide and the show was sadly never picked up by ITV for a fifth outing, but thankfully both Berlin and Crane have gone on to form successful careers in the media. Berlin has since returned to the area of videogames, hosting the well-received cable show *Gamepad*, but she isn't so sure that there's really a call for a similar programme in today's market: "At the moment it's tricky because podcasts and the internet mean that news, reviews and sneak peaks at games can get posted in seconds, whereas proper TV shows take a while to make, so any games-related TV show will always lag behind the times."

Titley, who has enjoyed a similarly colourful career working in TV since the days of *Bad Influence*, believes that it's the attitude of those in charge that makes it so hard to produce a similar show today. "I think commissioning editors aren't interested in games and they don't think that you can make an interesting and visual show from people playing games," he says, "which is absolute rubbish – of course you can. If you can make a programme about films, surely you can make one about games, which is a bigger global market. I've tried several times to get a show under way, but there just isn't any interest. I think Charlie Brooker is our best hope. Charlie, if you're reading this, get your people to call my people. We'll do lunch!"



PRINT AND BE DAMNED

■ Back in the early Nineties, magazines were still the best way to communicate with gamers, and the bestselling examples could easily shift hundreds of thousands of copies each month. Unsurprisingly, the creators of *Bad Influence* decided to tap into this market with an official publication of their own. "It was a collaboration between us and Europress Interactive, who already published some computer games mags and software," explains Titley. The content of the mag was produced exclusively by Europress, and it ran behind-the-scenes features from the show. The venture lasted just two issues, but Titley believes that it was a shrewd move regardless. "From our point of view we got free publicity in print, and a way to enhance the programme brand away from TV," he adds. "Also it was a way to get printed background material to viewers at no cost to us. Europress got a magazine that was effectively advertised on TV for free." (Special thanks to **www.bad-influence.co.uk** for providing the cover images.)

SAME NAME DIFFERENT GAME

When going by that front cover simply isn't enough



» [Mega-CD] If you think this screenshot is impressive, wait until you see it in motion.

Case 9: Batman Returns

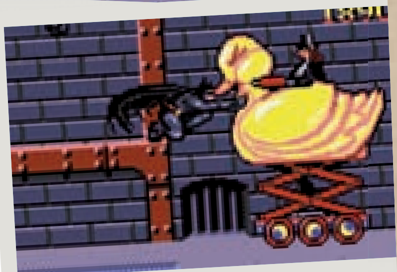
■ **FEATURED SYSTEMS:** ARCADE, GAME BOY, GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA-CD, MEGA DRIVE, NES, PC, SNES ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1992-1993

As with *Jurassic Park*, *Batman Returns* is a prime candidate for this feature. It's a conversion of an incredibly popular film and was programmed by a number of different developers, ranging from Konami to Denton Designs. As a result there are eight different versions of the game covering a wide range of genres, and they range in quality from the sublime to the downright terrible.

Exhibit 1: NES

■ Konami had the Nintendo translations of Tim Burton's sequel and it did a great job on both. While both of its *Batman* games are scrolling fighters, there are a number of distinct differences in them so that they deserve their own mentions. The NES one is a mighty fine little romp and features excellent, well-animated sprites and a variety of different locations, and it does a great job at following the film's plot. It lacks the moves of its SNES counterpart, but you still have access to a decent repertoire of attacks, including a *Final Fight*-style super attack that damages your health bar upon use. Another nice touch is the inclusion of two very slick scrolling shooter levels that put you behind the wheels of the Batmobile and Batskiboat.







» [NES] You rarely have to handle more than three enemies at a time, but *Batman Returns* is still real fun on the NES.

Exhibit 2: Atari Lynx

■ Packaged with the Lynx II, *Batman Returns* generally gets a lot of kudos on Atari's handheld, possibly because it looks absolutely beautiful. Batman's animation is exceptional and looks wonderful as he cleans up the streets of Gotham, while surprisingly funky tunes play away in the background. For all its aesthetic quality, *Batman Returns* is let down by its high difficulty level and questionable collision detection. It certainly isn't as frustrating to play as the Master System and Amiga offerings, but it's a shame that the high difficulty and repetitive gameplay weren't given as much attention as the presentation.

Exhibit 3: Super Nintendo



■ *Batman Returns* on the SNES is a fantastic beat-'em-up. In fact, we'll go as far as to say that it's the best brawler you can get on the system. While it lacks the cool scrolling vehicle sections of its NES counterpart, it does add excellent side-scrolling run-and-gun sections where Bats throws Batarangs around with gay abandon and uses his grappling hook to get out of sticky situations. He also has access to a staggering array of moves, ranging from simple kicks and punches to the ability to grab two thugs and smash their heads together. He's even able to grab enemies and use them to break windows and other objects. Add in some superb animation and a cracking rendition of the theatrical soundtrack and the end result is a glorious fighter and one of the best *Batman* games of all time. The lack of a two-player mode disappoints, but this is still wonderful stuff.



Exhibit 4: Mega Drive

■ While Konami went down the scrolling fighter path, Acme Interactive decided to make a sprawling action-adventure. Batman has huge levels to negotiate and has access to a variety of different power-ups, including his handy grappling gun, which allows him to reach out of the way places. It plays very similarly to Ocean's original *Batman* game for the 8 and 16-bit formats, but lacks their variety.

Visually it's a mixed affair. While the sprites are nice and large, they're nowhere near as well-animated as Konami's SNES release. Backgrounds are also rather murky and uninspiring, although they capture the grittiness of the movie. Our biggest ire, however, is the difficulty, with many of the bosses being an absolute nightmare. It's nowhere near as poor as the Amiga effort, but Sega fans should go with the Mega-CD outing.



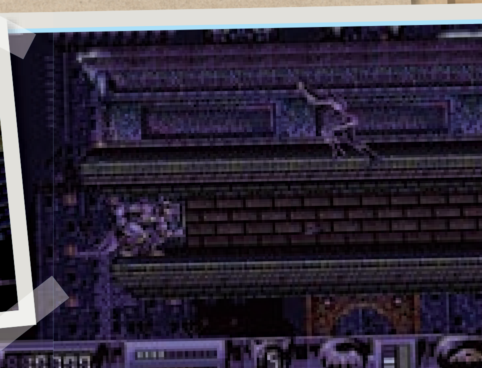
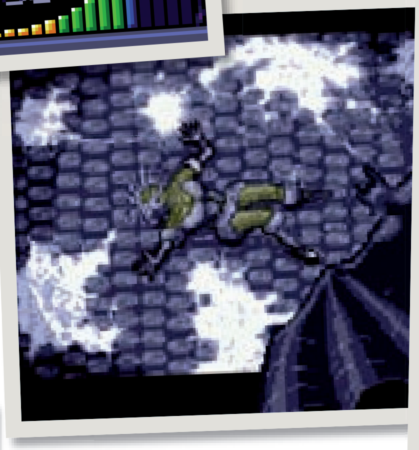




Exhibit 5: Mega-CD

■ The next time someone mentions to you that all the Mega-CD was good for was *Final Fight* and *Sonic CD*, show them this and give them a spoon so they can eat a healthy slice of humble pie. While the main sections are identical to the Mega Drive game, developer Malibu Entertainment has added some excellent extras that make this feel like a far more complete package. The best of these are some simply sensational 3D driving levels. Smooth as hell and putting the SNES's Mode 7 chip to shame, they feature massive sprites, loads of explosions, and a thumping soundtrack lifted directly from the film. Add in some great cut-scenes and cool scaling effects during the game's intro and ending, and the end result is a world away from the rather dull Mega Drive offering. Pick it up on eBay and be prepared for some of the best driving levels on any 16-bit system.



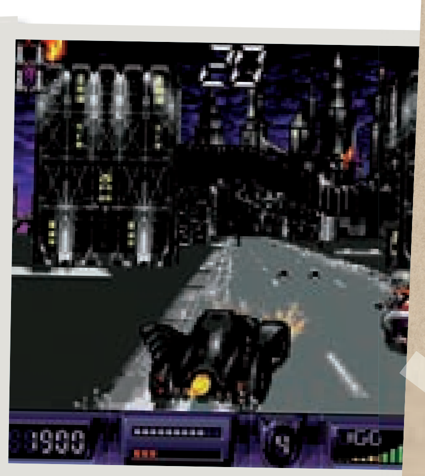
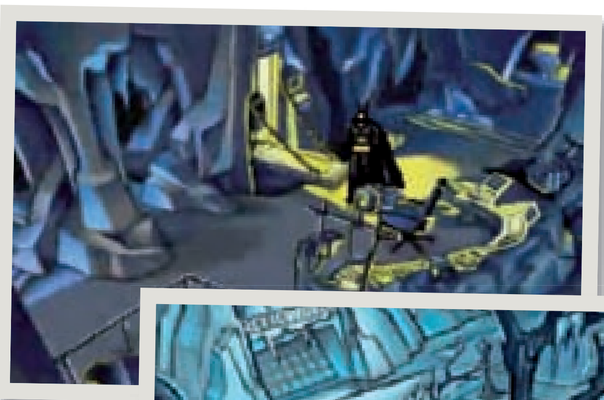
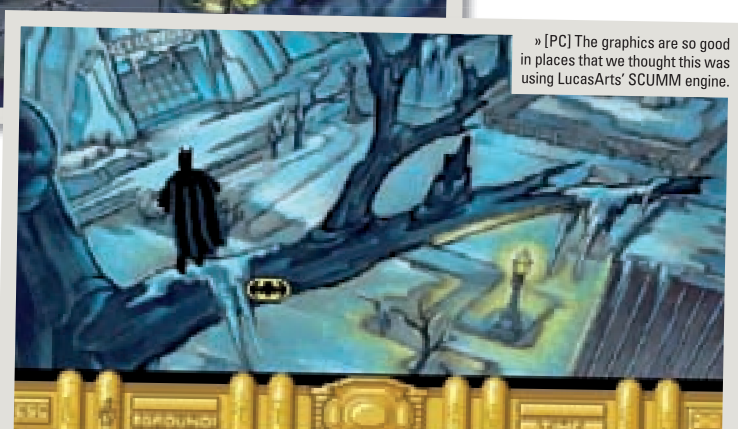


Exhibit 6: PC

■ We can't make our minds up about the PC game. It's a rather bizarre mish-mash of genres that tries hard, but doesn't quite pull them off. The main focus is on a nifty point-and-click adventure that sees Batman watching video feeds in his Batcave and searching beautifully detailed locations for clues. It sadly falls apart, though, in the numerous action sequences, which see Bats participating in some rudimentary combat that feels very unsatisfying compared to the rest of the game. It's pretty hard to track down and doesn't follow the plot of the film too closely, but it feels so unique that it would be a shame to miss out on it.





» [PC] The graphics are so good in places that we thought this was using LucasArts' SCUMM engine.

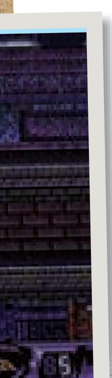
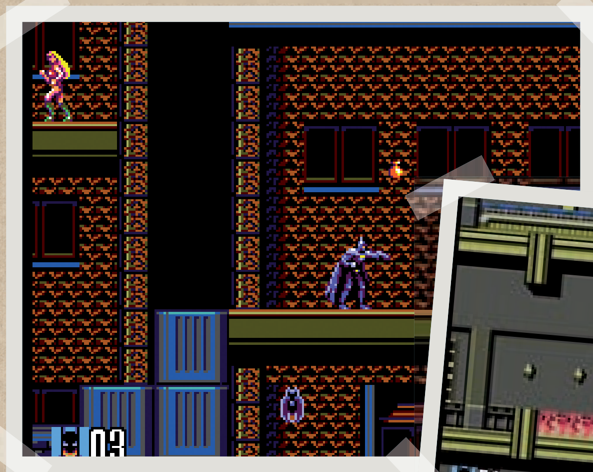


Exhibit 7: Master System/Game Gear

■ If there was ever an 'I'd rather bite my own thumbs off than play this ridiculously hard game' award then the 8-bit Sega games would instantly win it. While the addition of alternative routes at the beginning of each stage is a clever touch and adds to the title's longevity, *Batman Returns* is so insanely tough that only the most masochistic will be bothered to try to complete it anyway. Collision detection is awful, with a simple brush with an enemy instantly robbing you of a precious life, while the garish backdrop and weedy-looking sprites look absolutely appalling. Still, if you do want to punish yourself, be sure to play through the alternate routes for each stage, as their extensive use of the hard-to-use grappling gun is the very definition of poor game design.



» [SMS] Poor collision detection makes these jumps frustratingly difficult to pull off.

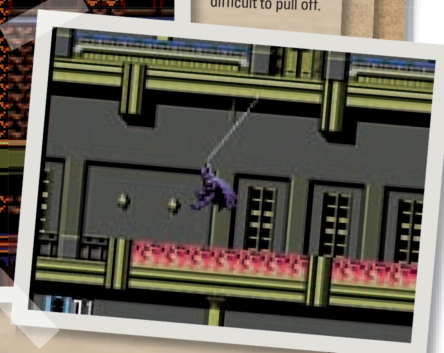
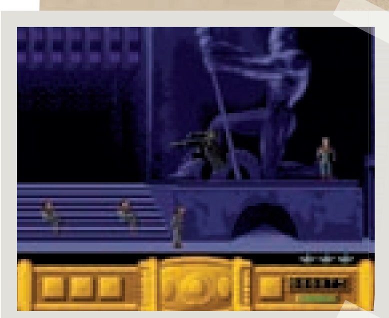
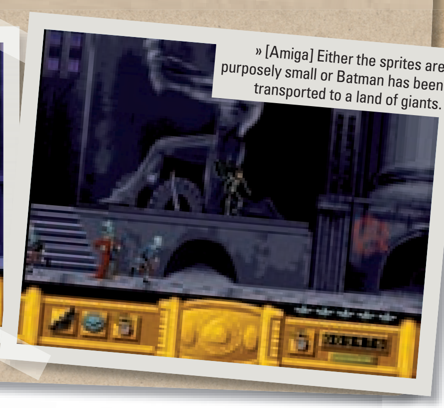


Exhibit 8: Amiga

■ It's shocking to think that this is by the same studio that churned out quality titles like *The Great Escape* and *Frankie Goes To Hollywood*. From its amazingly sloppy collision detection to its ugly visuals and dull gameplay, everything about this atrocious Amiga game screams 'rushed'. In fact, it's so appalling that we'd rather not waste any more ink writing about it…





» [Amiga] Either the sprites are purposely small or Batman has been transported to a land of giants.

The Verdict:

A difficult one, this, because there are some decent contenders. The Mega-CD's awesome driving stages make it a firm favourite, while we were also impressed with the PC offering. Common sense, however, says that this round belongs to Konami's excellent SNES game, even if it is missing a handy second player.





FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Dynamix

From its early days trying to make it as a game developer in a very new industry to its booming era as part of the Sierra family, Craig Ritchie takes us through the history of simulations giant Dynamix

A career in computer gaming isn't the first thing that springs to mind when someone tells you they're studying a Bachelor of Science in Biology, but Jeff Tunnell was never one to shy away from breaking the mould. "I took a lot of computer classes as I was getting my BS," he explains. "When the Apple computer came out, I couldn't resist. $2,500 bought me an Apple II, a green screen monitor and a disk drive. That was a smoking hot system!"

Once Tunnell had the Apple, he wasted no time setting about applying his programming knowledge to writing games. He was instantly hooked, fascinated by the machine and its potential, and a few months later the entrepreneurial Tunnell founded ComputerTutor. At the time, all software was sold in computer shops and no one had launched a store selling only software. Tunnell changed this. "It was the first software-only store in America," he recalls. "I know this because the bigger software-only store that claimed to be the first, and got credit for it, had a later founding date than ComputerTutor."

Tunnell maintained his interest in games all the while, and continued programming his own game while running ComputerTutor. He then started another business called Software Entertainment Company (SEC) as his attempt to make his first foray into the gaming world. It was just at this time that a young Chris Cole and two of his friends arrived on the scene.

"Paul Bowman, Clark Fagot and myself were all about 14 years old," recalls Cole. "My family had just bought an Apple II+ and Clark's family also had an Apple II+. As for Paul, well… he just hung out with us a bunch. About that time this new computer shop, The ComputerTutor, opened up. As a promotion, Jeff Tunnell had a contest that would give the customer with the highest score on a brand new game (*Snake Bite*) $100 in software. To us $100 was a *lot* of money, especially considering it was 1982. We all gave it a shot and lo and behold Clark won! So like a kid in a candy store, he chose $100 worth of computer games. We were in heaven."

"However, not all was completely rosy," continues Cole. "Apparently Jeff, who himself was only around 24 years old, did not completely trust us. He sort of infamously called us 'The Three Hoodlums'. Apparently he thought we were untrustworthy as we'd often come into the store and mull around for hours looking at the new games. He was certain we were shoplifting, but in actuality, we had no money and were really just salivating over the games we'd never be able to play. Anyhow, he got to know us a bit and finally started to understand that we loved games but just couldn't afford to buy a bad one. That's when the famous dare was made! I had just spent, or, rather, wasted my money on a particularly bad game and wasn't too happy about it. We were all hanging out at Jeff's store and I, being the most brash of the bunch, declared "I could write a better game in two weeks!" Jeff then replied, 'If you think you can, then do it… and I'll publish it!'"

INSTANT EXPERT

Founded by Jeff Tunnell and Damon Slye, Dynamix operated between 1984 and 2001.

Dynamix was one of the earliest true development studios in an era characterised by home coders and hobbyists.

It was among the leading programmers of simulation games through the 1980s and 1990s.

Slye and co put together the award-winning *Arcticfox*, one of the launch titles for the Amiga.

Dynamix had strong ties with Electronic Arts and later Activision before being bought by Sierra in 1990.

Dynamix only ever developed two movie tie-in games: *Ghostbusters II* and *Die Hard*, both of which were licensed by Activision at the time.

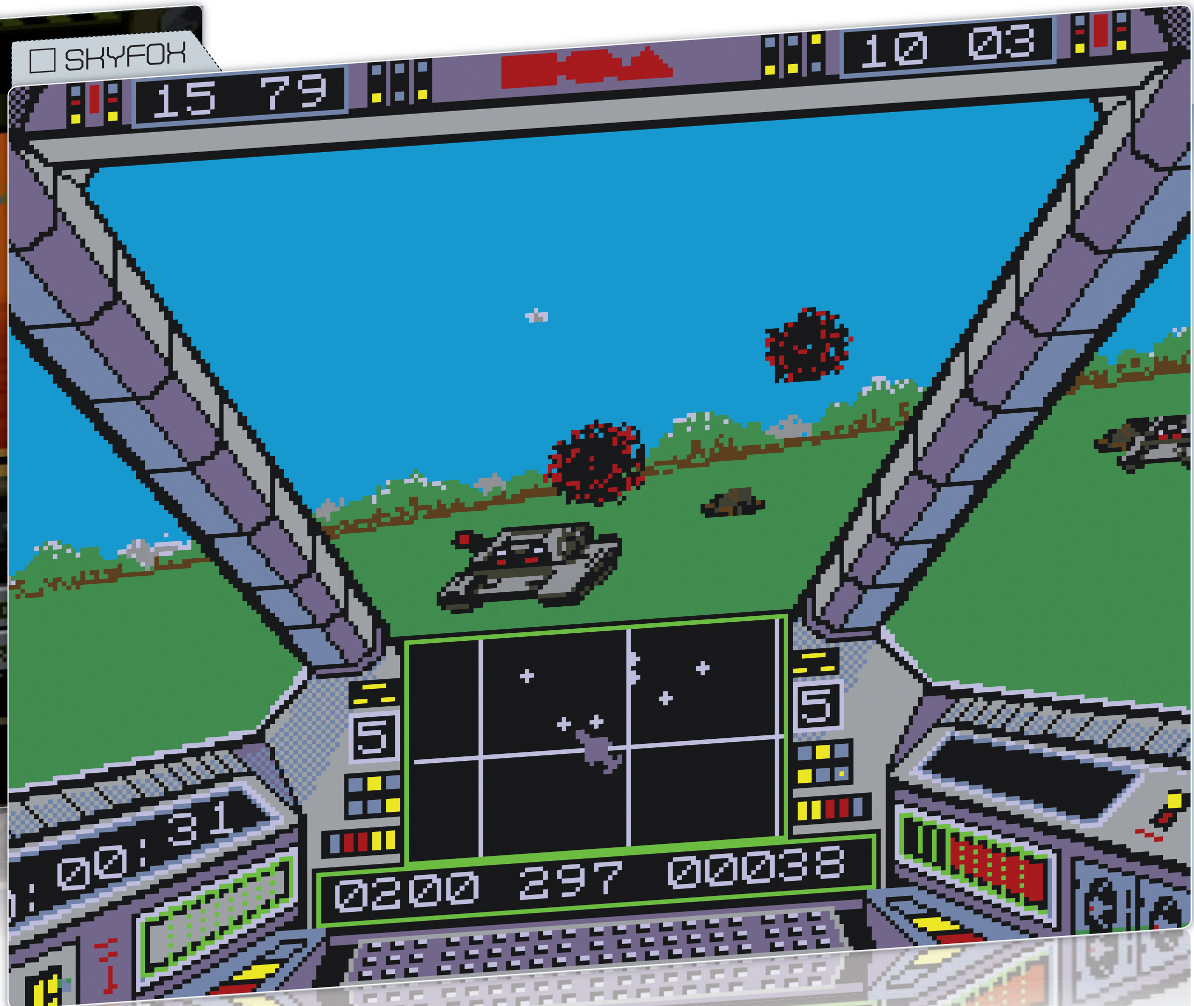
Sierra's Mark Crowe relocated to the company and *Space Quest 5* was developed by Dynamix.

The company became forerunners in large-scale multiplayer combat games, with *Tribes 2* capable of seeing 128 players battling it out.

All in all, Dynamix released close on 100 unique games and expansion packs.

Dynamix was eventually shut down by Sierra, whose parent company was tied to what was then the largest corporate fraud scandal in history.





“Ken Williams was impressed that we shipped seven games in one year”

SLYE RECALLS HOW DYNAMIX GOT SIERRA'S ATTENTION



Cole immediately got to work on his own game, employing the help of a few of his friends along the way. During this time, just as ComputerTutor had attracted Cole and his crew, so too would a young games fan named Damon Slye soon venture into the store. “I was in high school at the time, about 17 or 18 years old, and I would go in there to buy games,” recalls Slye. “I was just drawn to computer games. At some point Jeff offered me some part-time work in the store and I said ‘sure!’”

After working at ComputerTutor for a while, Slye mentioned to his new boss that he was making a game on his Apple II, and when he showed off his work Tunnell was impressed. The game? A 3D science fiction combat sim named *Stellar 7*. Tunnell told Slye of his games publishing intentions and tried to recruit the talented teenager into his new company, but Slye's grand ambitions led to some initial reservation. “Because I didn't really know who he was my attitude was more like ‘nah, I think I want to work with Broderbund or Electronic Arts or Sierra; somebody like that,’” recalls Slye. Tunnell saw that he'd have to make the idea all the more appealing to Slye, and offered him a 30 per cent royalty instead of the standard 20 per cent that he could expect from other publishers. Slye agreed, and the partnership that would soon see the creation of Dynamix was formed.

Chris Cole's two weeks, meanwhile, had turned into close on two and a half years, but he did eventually complete work on his own game, *The Sword Of Kadash*. “I finished up the game right about the same time Damon was finishing up his *Stellar 7* and together these two products launched Jeff's Software Entertainment Company.”

It didn't take long, however, before the realities of the barriers to entry in software publishing presented themselves. It was now 1984 and the already established big players had massive distribution networks in place, as well as the money to attract and pay top emerging talent. Realising this, Tunnell then came up with a new proposition for Slye. “Jeff told me that it was too late to get going on a publishing company without a lot of money,” says Slye. “Then he said ‘how about this: we form a partnership and you and I start a game development company instead?’”

Damon agreed, and because of the difficulty in trying to run the software store as well as a games business, Tunnell sold ComputerTutor to focus solely on games development. ComputerTutor owned the name SEC, however. Damon then came up with the name Dynamix, and instead of being publishers, Tunnell and Slye started a games development company – one of the first in the world.

Moving on up

Tunnell and Slye immediately started gathering talent for their fledgling

BY THE NUMBERS

3 The number of adventure games that were made using Dynamix's GDS technology.

4 The number of owners Dynamix had in 1984.

7 The number of games Dynamix produced in 1989.

27 The number of unique simulation games developed by the company.

30 The number of employees fired in February 1999.

60 The number of employees fired in September 1999.

650 The amount of dollars, per month, it cost Dynamix to hire the company's junior programmers.

8,000 The number of approximate total sales of the original release of *Stellar 7*, back in 1982.

35,000 The dollar amount of the publishing deal Dynamix signed with Electronic Arts.

350,000 The number of copies that *Aces Of The Pacific*, Damon Slye's most successful game, ended up selling worldwide.



» [PC] Originally of the Sierra stable, the fifth *Space Quest* game was actually developed by a team at Dynamix.

TIMELINE

1981 JEFF TUNNELL BUYS AN APPLE II AND FOUNDS HIS SOFTWARE STORE, COMPUTERTUTOR.

1982 CHRIS COLE BEGINS WORK ON *SWORD OF KADASH*.

1983 JEFF TUNNELL AND DAMON SLYE START SOFTWARE ENTERTAINMENT COMPANY.

1984 TUNNELL SELLS COMPUTERTUTOR AND DYNAMIX IS FOUNDED.



> **"I, being the most brash of the bunch, declared 'I could write a better game in two weeks!'"**
>
> CHRIS COLE'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO LANDING A JOB



THE LEGACY OF 3 SPACE

Damon Slye coded the original 3 Space engine when he was developing *Stellar 7* on the Apple II. The engine was then ported to the Amiga for the game *Arcticfox*, and then later ported across to the PC. Essentially, the underlying engine was such a success that it stayed in place, with the same 3D algorithms ported across different systems, for over ten years. "3 Space was basically there for the duration of Dynamix until they came up with a new engine for *Tribes*," says Slye. "I think that was the first game that broke out of 3 Space."

development house. They had received a game demo from a young coder named Kevin Ryan and were thoroughly impressed. "We looked at it and I thought it was incredible," says Slye. "Jeff and I talked about it and said that we have to bring this guy on because he's really talented." Soon after that, Ryan and a friend, Richard Hicks, joined up with Slye and Tunnell, becoming partner-owners in the young Dynamix.

With their talent in place, the slowly growing company started trying to make inroads with the larger publishers. They identified a potential in Electronic Arts, and Slye sent them a copy of *Stellar 7* to gauge their interest. "Joe Ybarra called," says Slye. "I think he said something like 'we're not interested in publishing *Stellar 7* because we think it's too much like *Battlezone*, but we'd be interested in meeting with you guys because we're launching a company and we need artists'."

The original excitement they felt at what seemed like a golden opportunity with the gaming giants soon turned to frustration as Ybarra never fully committed to signing Dynamix. Eventually, Slye grew tired of waiting. "He kept calling me but we weren't getting any deals or whatever," says Slye. "So I just called him up and said 'if you actually want to work with us, you have to sign us very soon because we're going to go away and do other things now – we're tired of waiting.'"

Ybarra had been impressed enough by the 3D technology in *Stellar 7* to know that he should not let this fresh developer from Oregon slip away to the competition, and invited it to EA headquarters to discuss something concrete. "We had this idea that was sort of like a *Prince Of Persia* thing," says Slye. "This *Indiana Jones*-style game with traps and all that, so we drove down and pitched the whole thing to EA."

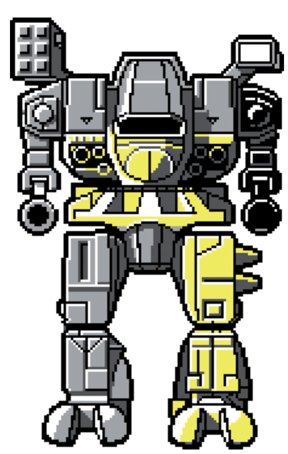
After the presentation, everyone in the room seemed positive and Dynamix thought it had it in the bag. That was until it got round to Joe Ybarra's final say. He said 'No, but we're interested in having you do a 3D tank game on the Amiga.'

This was the first the company had ever heard of the Amiga, and so it was with both the satisfaction and relief of finally signing a contract as well as curiosity about the new system that it got to work developing one of its key launch titles, *Arcticfox*.

"The Amiga hadn't even launched at that time," says Slye. "So when we started working on it, it was very secret and we were on prototype boxes – they were in a black steel case, the keyboard case was made out of wood and there were wires coming out everywhere. It was really cool."

Active visionaries

Arcticfox went on to be a great success, and given the clout that Electronic Arts had in the industry, Dynamix's profile skyrocketed. They kept working for EA for a few more years, developing memorable titles such as *Abrams Battle Tank* and *Project Firestart*, and the company had grown to around 20 people by the end of 1988. But by this time, Tunnell felt that Dynamix was due for a change.



"It is not a good thing to get 100 per cent of your revenue from one source," says Tunnell. "We were working 100 per cent with Electronic Arts, and decided that we needed to expand our customer base. I used to go to all of the CES and Software Publisher Association meetings, and I got to know everybody in the industry. It was easy to talk to the CEOs of all the companies. Dynamix rapidly got a good reputation, and everybody wanted to work with us."

"We were talking to a lot of companies, but Activision was the one we ended up moving to," adds Slye. "They were really trying to take on EA at the time, and we ended up moving from EA to them. We made an arrangement where everyone was happy, and then we signed a product deal with Activision."

The team got to develop games on some very big-name licenses that Activision had secured the rights for, such as *MechWarrior* – based on FASA's Battletech franchise – and the *Die Hard* and *Ghostbusters II* movie tie-ins. It was a productive and profitable year, and Dynamix ended up churning out a total of seven games by the end of 1989, five of which were for Activision. "I don't know how we managed to ship seven games," laughs Slye. "We were just cranking back then! I think everyone just knew what we were doing and we had technology that was mature. We had good people who had a lot of autonomy at that time. For example, the guy who made *Deathtrack* – Darek Lukaszuk – he just knew how to make the game largely on his own."

Now, although the team was doing well and had been producing good games for some impressive publishers, Tunnell and Slye had begun to feel that Dynamix was stagnating. "We had already decided that being a captive developer – that was our term for where you're a developer working solely for one publisher – you get stuck because of your cashflow needs. You get stuck and you can't get ahead, and so we realised that just being a developer wasn't taking us anywhere," says Slye.

- **1984** KEVIN RYAN AND RICHARD HICKS JOIN THE COMPANY AS OWNER-PARTNERS.
- **1986** SLYE COMPLETES WORK ON *ARCTICFOX*, A TOP LAUNCH TITLE FOR THE AMIGA.
- **1988** TUNNELL AND SLYE CREATE POSSIBLY THE FIRST EVER SURVIVAL HORROR GAME, *PROJECT FIRESTART.*
- **1989** DYNAMIX MANAGE TO SHIP SEVEN GAMES, IMPRESSING SIERRA CEO KEN WILLIAMS.
- **1990** DYNAMIX BECOMES "PART OF THE SIERRA FAMILY" AND JEFF TUNNELL PRODUCTIONS STUDIO OPENS.
- **1990** *RISE OF THE DRAGON*, DYNAMIX'S FIRST ADVENTURE GAME, IS RELEASED.
- **1993** DYNAMIX RELOCATES TO LARGER OFFICE SPACE AT RIVERFRONT RESEARCH PARK AS THE COMPANY GROWS BEYOND THE 100-EMPLOYEE MARK.
- **1993** TUNNELL AND COLE RECEIVE A PATENT FOR THE GAME CONCEPTS IN *SID & AL'S INCREDIBLE TOONS.*
- **1994** DAMON SLYE LEAVES THE COMPANY.
- **1995** AFTER HALF A DECADE IN HIS OWN STUDIO, JEFF TUNNELL RETURNS TO A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN DYNAMIX.
- **1996** *3-D ULTRA PINBALL* IS RELEASED AND THE SERIES GOES ON TO BE DYNAMIX'S LARGEST EARNER.
- **1998** *STARSIEGE: TRIBES* IS RELEASED AND BECOMES AN ONLINE GAMING PHENOMENON.
- **1999** JEFF TUNNELL LEAVES THE COMPANY FOR GOOD, AND CHRIS COLE LOSES HIS JOB SOON AFTER.
- **2001** DYNAMIX IS SHUT DOWN BY SIERRA AS A RESULT OF RESTRUCTURING UNDER NEW OWNER VIVENDI UNIVERSAL.



» The Dynamix team circa 1989, possibly after shipping seven games in a year.

"We decided that in order to really be worth anything," explains Tunnell, "we needed to own our own intellectual property and publish our own games. We had brought Tony Reyneke on to be our CFO (he was our accountant, and liked what we were doing), and he was helping us raise local 'angel capital'. During the capital raising process, I got a call from Ken Williams out of the blue. He wanted to license our 3D technology for some Sierra games for $300,000. That money was a godsend, and allowed our other capital rounds to close, so we could release *A-10 Tank Killer* and *David Wolf: Secret Agent* as an affiliate publisher with Activision. Ken liked our technology and products enough that he called me one day and said, 'Why don't we just buy you guys?'"

It was now 1990, and although *A-10 Tank Killer* and *David Wolf* had been released and were selling fine, the revenue they brought in wasn't actually proving enough to keep Dynamix afloat. The call from Ken Williams was a godsend.

"Ken was impressed by the fact that we shipped seven games in one year," explains Slye. "Early on he said 'there's no way you're going to ship all these… no way', so when we did, he liked it a lot and wanted to do an acquisition. Things like this were not really happening too much in the game business, and so he was sort of going outside the box wanting to do the acquisition. Eventually we worked out an arrangement with them and it worked out really well for everybody."

The Sierra family

Just before the acquisition went through, Dynamix had been working on its first adventure game: *Rise Of The Dragon*. Sierra and LucasArts had set the standard for adventure gaming with titles such as *Maniac Mansion* and the *King's Quest* series, but the crew at Dynamix wanted to try something entirely different.

"I just wanted to make a storytelling game in a way that I thought would make people care about the characters," recalls Tunnell. "Dynamix's adventure games started before Sierra bought us, and used our GDS technology. *Rise Of The Dragon* was nearly finished when we sold Dynamix."

In keeping with their wacky and exciting use of nomenclature (remember that Tunnell had called his first games company 'Software Entertainment Company'), Dynamix dubbed its adventure game toolkit 'Game Development System'. GDS was not only a handy tool for putting together their adventure titles, but was also a boon to productivity; it was designed to work over the office network so that different people could be building the same scene simultaneously, with non-technical staff able to craft dialogue and conversations, work on graphics and animations as well as set event triggers to move the story or action along. GDS proved an excellent tool, the timing was perfect, and Dynamix was able to release the very successful *Rise Of The Dragon* soon after being bought by Sierra.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Jeff Tunnell

Jeff Tunnell and fellow Dynamix big dog **Rick Overman** co-founded PushButton Labs after moving on from their very successful post-Dynamix endeavour, GarageGames. Among PushButton Labs' list of titles is the very successful Facebook game *Social City*, which currently has over 10 million active users. PushButton has also created *Grunts Skirmish*, an online semi-real-time strategy game, and released *The Incredible Machine Mega Pack* on **www.gog.com**, where you can buy almost every *Incredible Machine* game for only $9.99 (approx £6.50). He writes regularly both on his personal blog and for the community game portal Great Games Project. Jeff has also taken to rocking out stage with his band, The Procrastinators. When not busy with gaming or gigging, he lifts Olympic weights, enjoys riding motorcycles and is engaged in setting up Furrer Farms, a 200-acre organic farm.



Damon Slye

Damon Slye left Dynamix and spent almost 13 years away from the games industry. During this time he went back to university to complete a degree and also earned himself a pilot's licence – a direct result, says Damon, of having worked on so many simulation games and wanting to experience it for real. After a long hiatus, it was Jeff Tunnell who got Damon back into games, teaming him up with Chris Cole once more to found Mad Otter Games and work on the flight sim *Ace Of Aces*. Mad Otter also employs Dynamix alumni Paul Bowman, Nels Bruckner and Mark Brenneman, and is currently working on *Villagers And Heroes*, a free browser-based MMORPG. Like PushButton Labs, Mad Otter has also released some of its old property on **gog.com**, with the *Red Baron* Pack on sale for $9.99.

It was a good time for Dynamix, as Sierra had pulled it out of the captive developer rut it was in and saved it from what could have soon turned into dire financial straits. Sales were better than ever, and with the strong financial backing and the increase in the scale of its projects, Dynamix experienced growth like never before. "It was interesting," recalls Slye, "that after the acquisition Ken was interviewed by the *Register Guard*, the local paper here in Eugene. We were probably around 35 people and he said 'in a year there'll probably be about 120 people here' and I just thought 'you're crazy, man!', but he was right! Because once they bought us they started funding and letting us hire more people for our projects, so it was a big growth time."

After *Rise Of The Dragon* came the very popular World War I flight sim *Red Baron* (which was also quite far into production by the time Sierra came along), and the company's second game to use the Game Development System, *Heart Of China*, soon followed. It was shortly after this that Tunnell got started on his next project, which would go on to be one of Dynamix's most popular titles of the era: *The Adventures Of Willy Beamish*. "My big goal with *Willy* was to really raise the bar on story and animation. Willy was the first game in the world to use cell animations scanned in. We hired Disney animators. The first time I saw Willy walk across a room and jump on the couch, I knew we had something special. To raise the bar on the story, we hired Tony and Meryl Perutz, two writers from Hollywood. Tony, Meryl and I had weekly story sessions where they would bring in wild story elements, and I would work them into the adventure game format of puzzles, rooms, cut-scenes, etc. It was one of the most fun games that I ever worked on."

Like *Rise Of The Dragon* and *Heart Of China* before it, *Willy Beamish* sold well and Dynamix had produced yet another hit. Tunnell, always the entrepreneur, then left his managerial role at Dynamix to open Jeff Tunnell Productions (JTP). Here he had more creative freedom to work on his own projects, and even though it was a separate studio, JTP still worked closely with Dynamix and Sierra. Jeff Tunnell and Kevin Ryan then developed *The Incredible Machine*, a unique puzzle title and forerunner to *Sid & Al's Incredible Toons*, for which they received a patent for the title's distinctive game concepts.

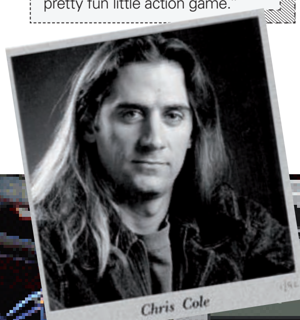
All good things

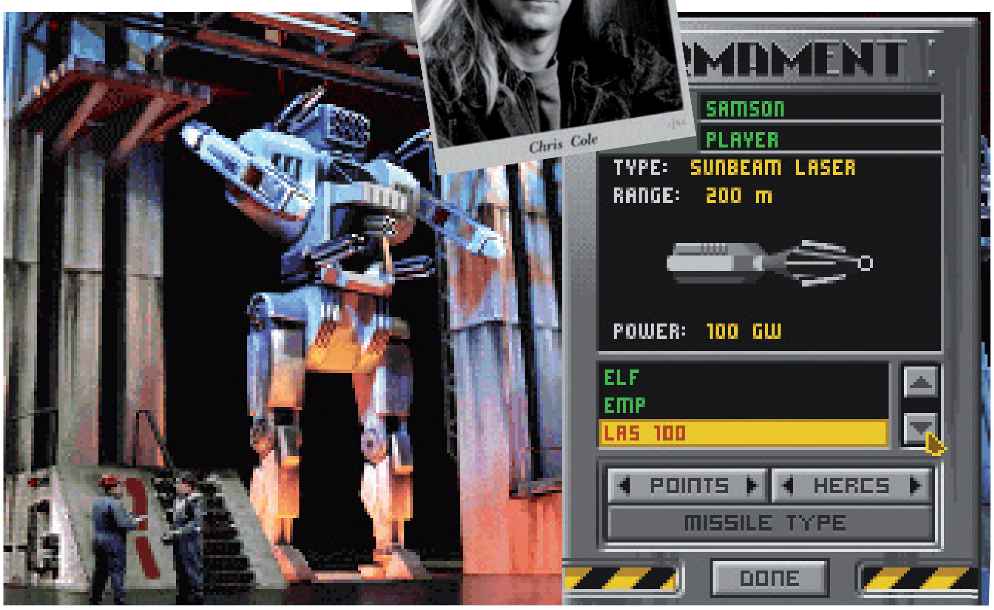
By 1994, however, Damon Slye had been with the company a decade and felt like he needed a change. He had just completed work on *Aces Of The Pacific*, a title that he says proved incredibly taxing, and was feeling utterly burned out by the gaming industry. "It was really strange because I was doing really well," he says. "I was making good money and doing cool stuff, but I was pretty much just working all the time. I didn't realise it at the time but I was probably a little depressed and so I wanted to get out of what I felt was a very isolated environment. I would just get up and go to work and work on games and then go home, so I wanted to get out and experience more things." Slye made up his mind, quit Dynamix, and left the industry altogether. He would not return to the world of gaming until 2007 when he founded Mad Otter Games with a group of fellow former Dynamix employees.

Despite losing Slye, it was still a great time for Dynamix in terms of game development. It saw more hit titles such as

CHRIS COLE'S PERSONAL BEST

Longtime Dynamix developer Chris Cole takes us through two of his favourite projects: "First off – and I only say this half jokingly – *The Sword Of Kadash* was the best game I ever wrote," says Cole. "There really was something magical about that first game. We all played it for hours and loved it. I've said for many years, 'Never make a game you would want to play, because by the time you finish it you'll never want to play it.' *Sword Of Kadash* was an exception for me to that rule. Aside from that, I wrote a really fun action game that didn't do so hot in the market called *Hunter Hunted*. This game was intentionally a souped-up side-scroller throwback, but that appears to have been a bad marketing decision as it was released right about when *Quake* was making its impact on the industry. It was buried in the marketplace by *Quake* and *Diablo*. It got good enough reviews – mid-8s, if I remember – but nobody ever saw it… I thought it was a pretty fun little action game."



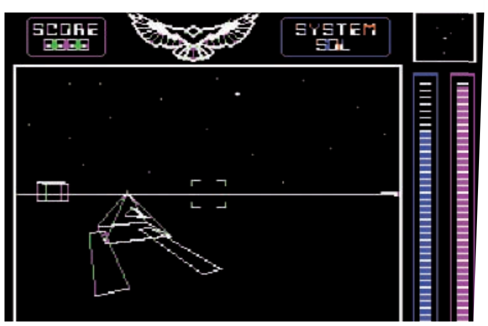








» [Mega Drive] Realtime Games Software ported Damon Slye's *Abrams Battle Tank* to the Mega Drive



» [Apple II] The first version of *Stellar 7* was actually released before Dynamix was formed.

SIX OF THE BEST



The Adventures Of Willy Beamish (1991)

Possibly Dynamix's most memorable adventure game, this 'kids' game for adults' boasted incredible graphics and animation thanks to Dynamix employing former Disney artist Rene Garcia.



The Incredible Machine (1992)

A standout title, *TIM* is the ultimate physics puzzle game, offering bowling balls, monkeys, bicycles and other tools for building comically complex 'machines' that achieve simple goals.



Betrayal At Krondor (1993)

A classic RPG built in Raymond E. Feist's classic world, *Betrayal At Krondor* received rave reviews. Feist would go on to novelise the story, which has been accepted by hardcore fans as canon. We strongly urge readers to give it a try.



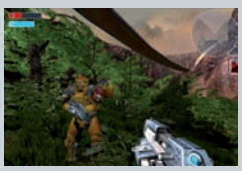
Red Baron (1990)

A brilliant flight sim that had both brilliant campaigns as well as a customisable mission generator for unlimited replayability. It's easy to understand why Damon Slye considers it to be his favourite game he worked on.



MechWarrior (1989)

The first official BattleTech sim that saw players able to control robots in future combat, *MechWarrior* was a big hit. The game offered a good variety of mechs and enabled players to follow the storyline or pursue a life as a freelance mech warrior.



Starsiege: Tribes (1998)

Despite arriving very late in Dynamix's life, this FPS went on to be one of its most memorable titles. It was Dynamix's attempt at a *Quake* killer, and the large outdoor areas added a new element to the claustrophobic world of FPSs.

TWO TO AVOID



David Wolf: Secret Agent (1990)

David Wolf: Secret Agent was Dynamix's take on James Bond, complete with over-the top villains, the hot dame, and the nerdy tech guru who provides Wolf with his nifty gadgets and souped-up vehicles. It was an experimental title that used video cut-scene stills to tell the story between its various simulation sections, but unfortunately it suffered from poor execution in certain parts. Perhaps *David Wolf* should be looked back on more as a prototype predecessor to Dynamix's other cinematic titles.

Metaltech: Battledrome (1995)

This was basically *Wing Commander: Academy* for the *Earthsiege* universe, and felt to many like a slapped-together battle simulator with little depth or story – and that's because this is exactly what it was. Battledrome's major draw card was that it introduced multiplayer mech – sorry, Herc – combat for the first time, and was always intended to be seen as a two-player game. The addition of network and modem play was a step forward, but as a standalone product, it just didn't bring enough to the table to justify a purchase.





"Instead of being a publisher, we decided to be a game developer – one of the first in the world"

JEFF TUNNELL ON STEPPING UP FROM THE DAYS OF BEDROOM CODING

the *Front Page Sports* series, the *Aces* series, and the *Earthsiege* games and, in 1995, his stint with JTP over, Jeff Tunnell returned to Dynamix full-time, a welcome homecoming to a company that for a year was without either of its original founders. It would be a short stay, though. Ken Williams sold Sierra in 1996, and things began to turn sour for the company not long after that. Dynamix put out more great games, with perhaps the most notable being the 1998 multiplayer FPS hit, *Starsiege: Tribes*, but trouble was brewing on a corporate level, and the effects were soon felt on the ground. Sierra quickly went from dedicated gaming house to corporate commodity, experiencing a string of sales to various corporations and then breaking down almost entirely because of a case of accounting fraud committed by then owner Cendant Corporation. In 1999, after a series of brutal lay-offs, Tunnell left what Sierra and Dynamix had become to start up GarageGames with three other former Dynamix employees.

This time also saw the departure of Chris Cole, among many others. "I was laid off when Jeff left the company in September 1999," he says. "The company at that point had got pretty corporate and I had been very aligned with Jeff, so in that changing of the guard, I assume, the powers that be saw an opportunity to get rid of some of his lieutenants." Cole was one of 60 people who were laid off, a huge chunk of Dynamix's then 170-strong workforce. Tunnell, Slye, Cole and many other longtime stalwarts were gone, the soul of the company with them. Two years later, on 14 August 2001, Dynamix was closed forever.

"It was sad the way the whole thing worked out," says Slye. "I mean, I still don't know exactly why it was shut down… there are a lot of different rumours about why that was. But I know it was a big French water company, so I don't understand that. It's a weird world… but I'd been apart from it for so long already, and it ended up being one of those creative destruction things in that after it shut down all these other things sprang up out of it."

Jeff Tunnell shares similar sentiments about the end days of his company, and, like Slye, maintains that even though Sierra shut it down, the core of Dynamix is still very much alive thanks to what its former staff are up to now. "It was sad to see Dynamix close two years after we started GarageGames," says Tunnell. "By that time we didn't really even know what was going on inside the company, but we did still have a lot of friends working there. Dynamix still lives on in Eugene, though. Buzz Monkey, Pipeworks, Playdom Eugene, PushButton Labs, Mad Otter, Game Clay, GarageGames, and others still have roots that trace back to Dynamix. In a way, Dynamix is stronger than ever."



The Lords Of Midnight

ONE RING TO RULE THEM ALL... NO, WAIT

» RETROREVIVAL



» ZX SPECTRUM
» BEYOND SOFTWARE
» 1984

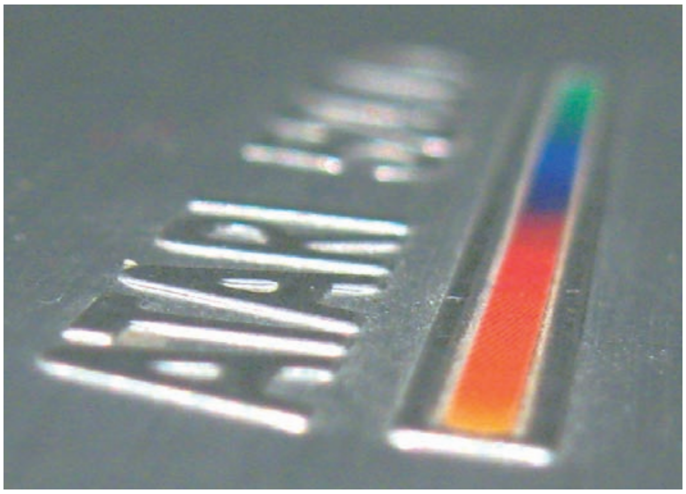
If you were a kid in the Eighties, and a videogame fanatic who also happened to be obsessed with Tolkien – with a possible hankering to 'be' Frodo – you were likely to have been disappointed with officially licensed fare. The hotly anticipated Parker Brothers *Lord Of The Rings* Atari 2600 game never materialised, and Melbourne House's 1985 follow-up to *The Hobbit* – a dull text adventure – was a turgid, dull, somewhat incoherent text adventure. These negative experiences must have so damaged videogaming's collective psyche that it was 1988 before a subsequent game set in Tolkien's universe was attempted: the slightly overambitious but nonetheless impressive and engrossing *War In Middle-earth*.

That the last of those games was actually pretty good might have something to do with the involvement of Mike Singleton, who'd a few years earlier created his very own 'Middle-earth' of sorts. In an unashamed 'tribute' to Tolkien, Singleton fashioned the astonishingly ahead-of-its-time strategy/adventure title *The Lords Of Midnight*. Despite it being released for the ZX Spectrum and converted to the equally underpowered C64 and Amstrad CPC, *The Lords Of Midnight* stands the test of time today, and, amazingly, still has people arguing about the best strategies to defeat Doomdark, the suitably named bad guy, who isn't at all a thinly disguised Sauron.

Ultimately, though, the names and the overly familiar fantasy territory don't really matter; they never did. To a child's eyes, *The Lords Of Midnight* was like being dumped at the edge of Middle-earth. With the breathtaking landscape system, you were afforded freedom within a huge map that meant the game felt far more like an epic fantasy quest than Melbourne House's limited text adventure. Today, the sense of wonder remains on reacquainting yourself with Luxor and pals, although this feeling is naturally mixed with admiration for Singleton's technical genius and a touch of sadness that the originally conceived trilogy was never completed on 8-bit hardware. Still, *Lords* and its magnificent sequel, *Doomdark's Revenge*, ensure that there's enough *Midnight* for any retro gamer. *




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Launched in 1982 as Atari's high-end system to bring the full arcade experience to the home, the 5200 instead turned into Atari's two-year detour on the way to the release of the 7800. Martin Goldberg reveals all

ATARI 5200

Release Info:

- **Year released:** 1982
- **Original price:** $299.95
- **Associated magazines:** *Atari Age*, *Antic*
- **Buy it now for:** $30-$100

» This planned deluxe controller featured an arcade-style trackball, for the full experience in the home.



The Atari 5200 may be unfamiliar to UK gamers, as it never saw a PAL release. What should have been the system to bring Atari into the Eighties, had it been released when originally proposed in the late Seventies, instead became a long and winding path to missed opportunities and bad execution. Stepping into the 5200's internal design gives the key to its origins and sheds some light on the troubled path it took as a concept and design, before it was finally released to market in October of 1982. Internally, the 5200 is an Atari 400 PCS (Personal Computer System) – the lower-end machine of Atari's late Seventies/early Eighties computer line – which is not a random fact being thrown at you when you take into account how the 400 was initially proposed.

Codenamed 'Candy', the Atari 400 was initially meant to be a lower-end game console to complement the higher-end 'serious' computer, codenamed 'Colleen'. The vision of the design team leader, Jay Miner, the new game console was to replace the team's previous console, the Atari 2600. Miner's idea was to leverage the new custom sound and graphics chips that they were designing, for a console with a keyboard directly on it, the idea being that game programmers would be able to develop right on the console itself, rather than the then-arduous process of developing on 6502 simulators running on time-sharing mainframes and then burning the games to an EPROM to test on the real thing. As team member Joe Decuir recalled: "We knew we would need to leapfrog the 2600 before somebody else did. It had to support home computer character and bitmap graphics. We saw the Apple II, Commodore, and Radio Shack appliance machines coming."

The 2600's time being limited was echoed by the slow sales that 1978 Christmas season and the rallying cry of Atari head at the time Nolan Bushnell. Bushnell thought that, much like Atari's previous plethora of *Pong* machines, the 2600's time on the market was limited to around two years before the company had to introduce a new console. It was the same gut instinct that he had gone on since the early coin-op days of Atari, when to stay ahead of the 'me too' competitors it had to continuously innovate and release new machines or fall behind. Unfortunately – or fortunately, depending on how you look at it – Atari was a Warner Communications company now and not a private game-engineering firm. Warner's vision was one of stability for its company, and getting better sales out of its products on the market at the time. It was a time when Atari itself was tanking, going from profits of $40 million in 1977 to what would be just $2.7 million in 1978. Bushnell being an absentee manager popping up with random directions and epiphanies didn't help, and in February 1978 Warner brought in a consultant to help make the company profitable again: Ray Kassar. Kassar and Bushnell spent the rest of 1978 butting heads, and Bushnell's stand at the Warner budget meeting that November would be his last. Getting in a shouting match with Warner's heads over drastically reducing the price of the 2600 to move it faster, they realised that he had to be completely taken out of the loop. After a feeble attempt to retain control of Atari by having a management meeting with Warner executives left out, the parent company decided to put Bushnell out to the corporate pasture, forcing him to retire.

By 1979, Kassar was in charge, and he put in place the idea to market the 2600 year-round, in direct opposition to Bushnell's plan – something executives at other videogame companies had been calling for since early in 1978. Atari also licensed the smash arcade hit *Space Invaders*, which, when released in 1980, gave the 2600 the shot in the arm it needed, and Atari was back up to $80 million in profits for that year. Kassar also put into place his vision for Atari's new computer, and in the process axed the idea of a replacement for the 2600. Kassar's vision for Atari's computer line was coloured by his former position at the textile manufacturing



» The inclusion of the ageing and unimpressive *Super Breakout* as the console's pack-in raised eyebrows.

company Burlington Industries. Targeted towards mass consumer products like towels, carpets, and other woven products, Kassar felt his experience at Burlington gave him a keen sense of consumerism. He felt the computers should be developed and marketed as easy-to-use, consumer-oriented products in contrast to the overly technically inclined audience that home computer designers were then targeting. And although his suggestion during a meeting that the computers be marketed in different colours to attract housewives caused some Atari employees to quit on the spot, it turned out to foreshadow the way the market would go under Steve Jobs 20 years later with his coloured line of iMacs.

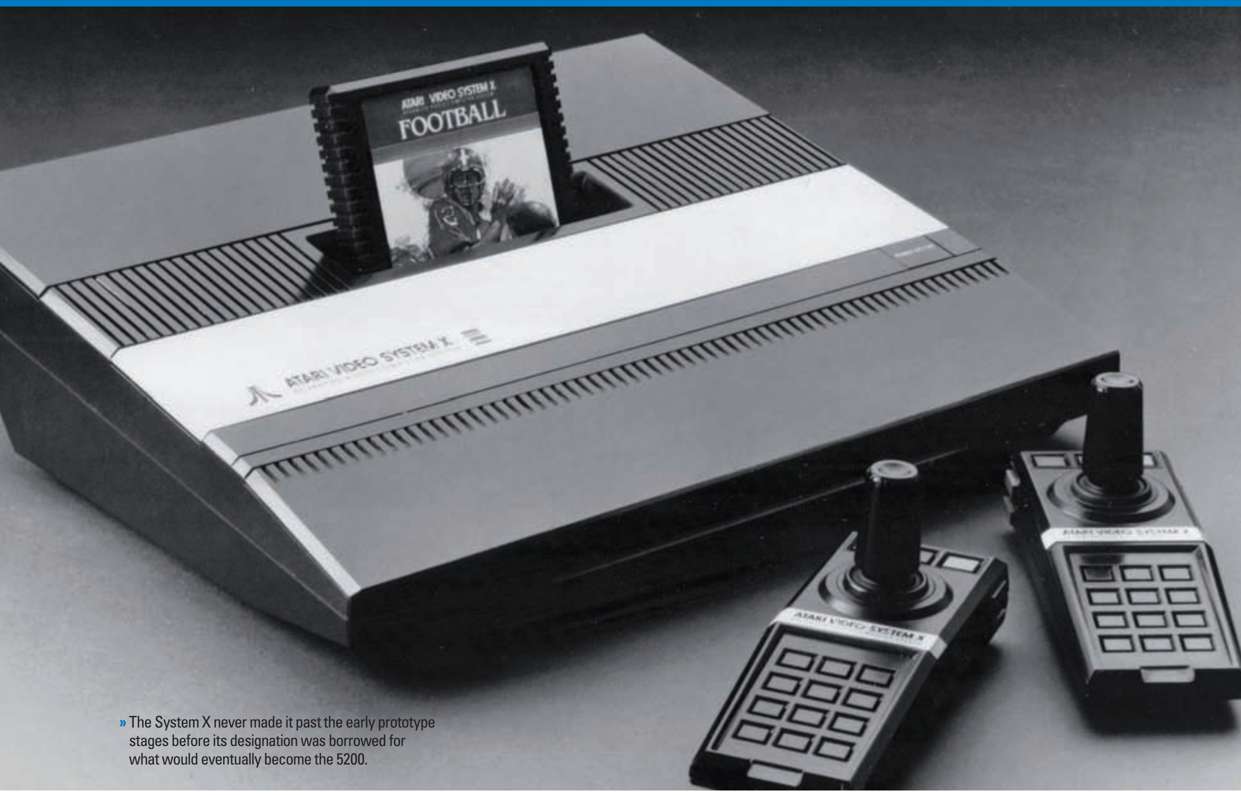
The problem was, with how right Kassar had been on everything, Bushnell was also right. By 1980 what would be the 2600's biggest competitor, Mattel's Intellivision, would be launched nationally, followed by a blitz of ads showing the Intellivision's more detailed sprites and the advantages of its 16-direction controllers, all summed up by a snooty and arrogant George Plimpton showing side-by-side comparisons. Combined with the rise of a third-party market of 2600 games thanks to the defection of some of Atari's game programmers to form Activision, Kassar knew that the company had to do something or lose its grip on the industry. And the rest of Atari knew that it now had no choice but to work on a direct answer to the Intellivision.

Steve Bristow and a team of engineers began working on an update to the 2600, codenamed 'Super Stella', 'Sylvia', the '3200', and even 'System X' at different times. They decided to bring the 2600's design more towards the new computer line by reproducing the format of the custom graphics chip team of GTIA and ANTIC. Keeping it backwards compatible with the 2600 was imperative, and accomplished by substituting the GTIA with an advanced version of the 2600's TIA graphics and sound chip called Super TIA or STIA. Likewise, System X was to get its own version of the ANTIC called FRANTIC, and the addition of a Votrax voice synthesis chip. It would also get a memory upgrade from 128 bytes to a full 2K of memory, which was a big upgrade for 1980 and more in line with Intellivision's standards, if not more powerful when the ANTIC's display list technology was considered. The console and controllers would use a new advanced wedge shape design form by designer Roy Nishi, which he was also using for the in-development remote control version of the 2600 called the Atari 2700. The controllers themselves featured side-mounted buttons and an eight-direction digital joystick with the look of a primordial Atari 5200 controller. Unfortunately, System X only got as far as full schematics and a black box development unit, along with case and controller mockups, before notice came down the line that it was scrapped. Apparently the guys in the Home Computer Division (HCD) were raising a ruckus over their technology being marginalised if the Super TIA would have gone all the way through development. In a classic example of wasting time by running in circles, the push was made to use Atari's PCS technology after all.

"The Atari 5200 was created for those players who demand video game technology"
– MICHAEL MOONE, PRESIDENT OF ATARI CONSUMER ELECTRONICS DIVISION

Recycling the System X designation and some of the casing and controller work, in 1981 this new system's development started. This time, however, given the full support of Kassar and the Consumer Electronics Division (CED), all stops would be pulled to create a deluxe game system. In order to crush Intellivision, and in effect start the





» The System X never made it past the early prototype stages before its designation was borrowed for what would eventually become the 5200.





next generation of 8-bit game consoles, they wanted to try to bring a full arcade experience to the home.

First, the team started moving the entire multiboard PCS architecture to a single board system that would fit in the wedge-shape case form factor. This included keeping the unique four controller ports, but moving to a novel hookup scheme by combining the power and antenna cord into a single cable that attached to a combined antenna/power box. A setup not seen since the RCA Studio II in 1977, Atari upped the ante by making it auto-switching – the very first console to do so.

Secondly, work was done to try to bring in controller features to compete against Intellivision's 16-direction keypad-driven controller, while providing the functionality for paddle-driven games that a digital controller simply could not support. The answer came in the form of a full analogue controller driven by two potentiometers, which when combined together would give a full 360-degree range of motion as well as provide accuracy for paddle games. It had the added benefit of being able to support velocity-tracking to control a character's speed of motion. The side-mounted buttons of the original System X's controllers were split into two A and B buttons on each side. Finally, a full keypad was added to the controller's empty space to allow the extra input control expected in the more advanced games on Atari's computer systems. Besides the start and reset buttons, both also found on the PCSs, a feature that gamers had been clamouring for was added as well: a pause button. This new controller was referred to as the 'Universal Game Controller', meant to imply that this was a deluxe controller – a luxury experience. To go with that experience, the team leveraged the now-cancelled Atari 2700's console-based controller storage area, complete with flip-up smoked plastic lid to complement anyone's early Eighties entertainment centre.

"No! We are not HCD! We don't want the 5200 to be a computer!"

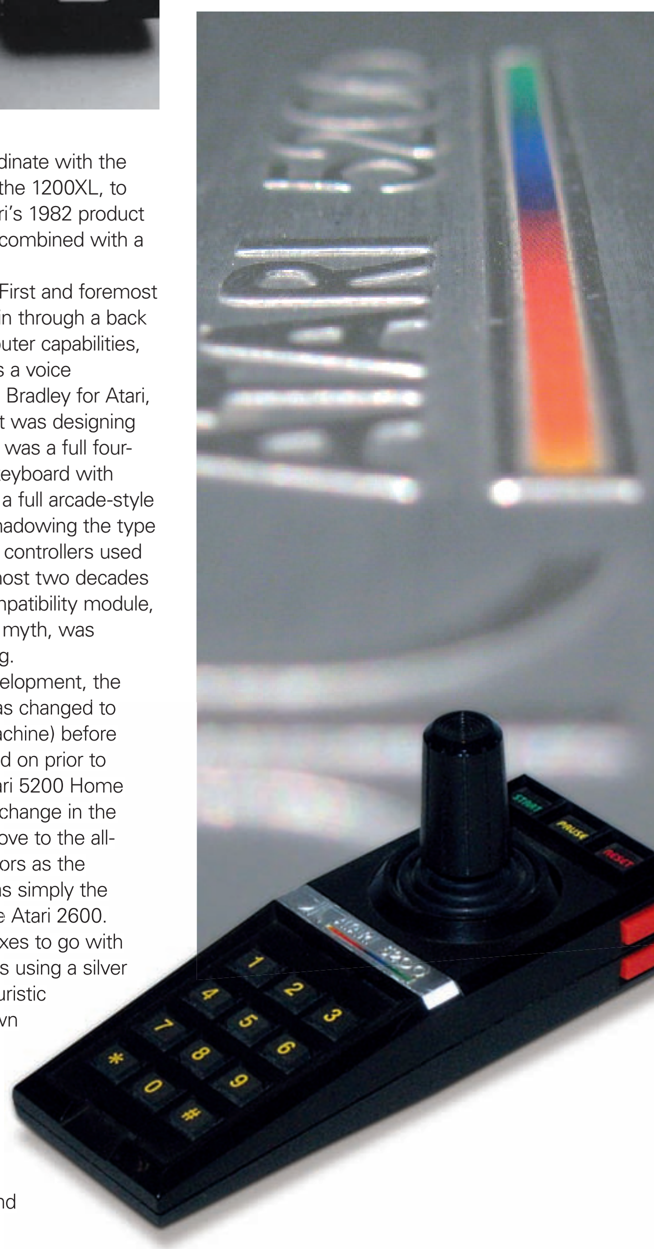
– GEORGE KISS, DIRECTOR OF SOFTWARE, CONSUMER ELECTRONICS DIVISION

The case itself also was updated to co-ordinate with the HCD's pending update to its computer line, the 1200XL, to give a unified look across the entirety of Atari's 1982 product line. In came glossy and matte black plastic combined with a futuristic brushed metal inlay.

A bevy of peripherals were also planned. First and foremost was a keyboard expansion that was to plug in through a back expansion port, giving the 5200 some computer capabilities, including peripheral expansions. Second was a voice expansion module being designed by Milton Bradley for Atari, which would coincide with the version that it was designing for the 2600 as well. Third was a full four-voice, 48-octave musical keyboard with stereo output. Fourth was a full arcade-style 'Trak-Ball' controller, foreshadowing the type of in-home full-size arcade controllers used by MAME enthusiasts almost two decades later. Last was a 2600 compatibility module, which, contrary to popular myth, was planned from the beginning.

During much of the development, the system's internal name was changed to PAM (Personal Arcade Machine) before the final name was decided on prior to its public unveiling: the Atari 5200 Home Entertainment System. The move caused a change in the 2600's naming as well, just in time for its move to the all-black version affectionately known to collectors as the 'Darth Vader' model. Previously referred to as simply the Video Computer System, it now became the Atari 2600. Atari also updated the console and game boxes to go with the new launch, with boxes for both systems using a silver motif. Additionally, game boxes received futuristic hologram stickers, remnants of the shut-down Atari Cosmos tabletop game project.

Atari was also very careful in its pending marketing strategy for the system to explain that the 5200 was not a replacement for the 2600. At $299.95, it was to be considered a high-end, state-of-the-art videogame system, with the 2600 and



Community



1. Atari Museum
www.atarimuseum.com
■ The Atari Museum, home of the Atari Historical Society, is the premier Atari archive. Run by noted Atari historian Curt Vendel, the site houses information and exclusive material not found anywhere else, thanks to Vendel's close ties to former Atari employees.



2. AtariAge
www.atariage.com
■ If you want to find the current fan base of the 5200, you'll find it at AtariAge's bustling online community. The de facto community site for the Atari scene, you'll also find a store that supports current 5200 homebrew authors with full packaged releases of their games.



3. Cafeman's Atari 5200 Supersystem Page
cafeman.www9.50megs.com/atari/atari5200.html
■ Ron Lloyd's shrine to the 5200 hasn't been updated in a while, but still remains a great source of information and commentary from some of the original Atari 5200 game developers.



4. Best Electronics
www.best-electronics-ca.com/cx52_j.htm
■ We've all heard about the problems with 5200 controllers breaking down. With 26 years in the business supplying replacement parts from Atari's original warehoused service stock, this is the place to go for every single part needed to repair your controllers.

5200 comprising "two home game systems in the same spirit in which an automobile manufacturer builds different models to suit different tastes".

With press first going out in May of 1982 and the big intro at the June CES with a view to an October launch, things were looking great for the console. Or so they thought.

In May, when Atari was announcing its next-generation system, another company thought to be long out of videogames surprised everyone. Coleco started announcing its own next-generation videogame system, the ColecoVision. Atari was caught completely off-guard and had to scramble to start a strategy against its new main competitor, once it was able to see the console at the June CES. Here it was, ready to kill Mattel and claim victory over the market by creating a new high-end niche while dominating the low end, and now the game had completely changed.



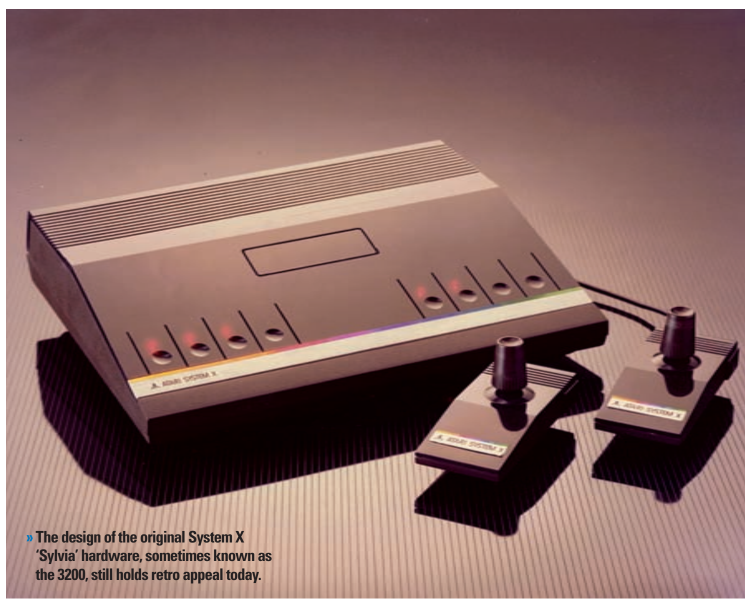
To make matters worse, during August and September focus groups were less than positive about the 5200's controllers. While many of the testers understood the possible advantages of learning to use the new controller format in the long run, most complained about the lack of resistance in the controllers, as well as the difficulty in playing four-direction precision games like *Pac-Man*. Also, in direct side-by-side focus tests with the ColecoVision, testers thought games on both systems looked equally great, with Atari's only advantage being that the system's case and controller styling were more appealing. Media reviews had a similar outlook, with the addition of complaints that the initial launch titles were the same old games already on the 2600, including the surprise inclusion of *Super Breakout* as the pack-in game instead of one of Atari's more high-profile licences like *Pac-Man*.

Likewise, many of the planned expansions and peripherals became like roadkill on the road to market survival. CED's pride and competition against HCD caused it to want to make sure the 5200 was nothing like the Atari 400, and that it would never be mistaken for a computer. Axed were the keyboard expansions by the October launch, which soon after also led to the cancellation of the voice expansion for both the 5200 and 2600, and an eventual lawsuit from Milton Bradley.

Atari worked to rectify many of these faults, however, and managed to release a good number of new titles for the system over the coming year. It also managed to delay some games for its other platforms to make sure that the 5200 had a certain degree of exclusivity. By 1983, a revised two-controller-port model was released with sturdier parts on the controllers and a new pack-in game: *Pac-Man*. It also dropped the odd single power/television cord in favour of a more traditional two-cable separate switchbox setup. However, by that time sales were already seen as lacklustre, and the console's future was being questioned, both inside the company and by industry commentators. To make matters worse, the 2600 module was absent almost the entire time, giving Coleco the advantage of backwards compatibility with the 2600 via its own module. By the time it appeared for the two-port model, owners of the older four-port version found that they couldn't use it, save for the few that were lucky to get the last revision before the move to the newer model.

A final cost-reduced version was being worked on, codenamed the 5100, which cut the physical size of the console in half and included new CX-52L controllers – especially designed self-centring joysticks with spring-loaded side buttons – but it never made it to market. By February of 1982, production of the 5200 was secretly ended. When Atari finally acknowledged it in May, it was ready to position the upcoming Atari 7800 as its replacement. As is well-known, however, Atari became a prominent victim of the North American videogame crash of 1982-1984, with the entire consumer division sold off to Jack Tramiel to form his Atari Corp. Unknown to many collectors, Tramiel actually re-released the four-port 5200 version in 1985 in an effort to sell off his sizeable inherited back stock of products. Featuring cost-reduced packaging and a return to the *Super Breakout* pack-in, he also re-released many of the previous games in similar packaging. Tramiel brought to market several previously finished but unreleased games that were thought victims of the crash: *Gremlins* and the groundbreaking Lucasfilm titles *Rescue On Fractalus!* and *Ballblazer*. Actually generating strong sales for several years during this era of the NES, Sega Master System and Atari 7800, support for the 5200 was finally dropped by 1991, closing the book on what was once to be Atari's flagship console.





» The design of the original System X 'Sylvia' hardware, sometimes known as the 3200, still holds retro appeal today.

Special thanks to **Kris Kelley** and the Atari Historical Society **(atarimuseum.com)** for kindly supplying hardware images



Perfect Ten Games



01

SINISTAR

» **RELEASE:** 2010
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARIAGE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** N/A

01 **The first coin-op** game to inspire fear in gamers with its boss's demonic-sounding digitized voice, Atari was working on a port for its 8-bit computers when the company cancelled it due to its severe financial problems. Almost completely finished save for some minor points, it remained a distant memory while passing through many hands over the years. That is until recently, when a 5200 homebrewer ported the game to the 5200 and AtariAge decided to make full productions complete with great label art. The game truly shows off the 5200's capabilities of reproducing early Eighties arcade titles, and the gameplay is great, successfully re-creating the franticness of the original.

MILLIPEDE

» **RELEASE:** 2002
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARIAGE
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** N/A

02 **Yet another victim** of Atari's implosion, *Millipede* is a port of Atari's seminal follow-up to its monster 1980 hit, *Centipede*. Ready to go and even listed in the 1984 catalogue back in the day, its axing meant that gamers wanting to play *Centipede* would have to either purchase the 8-bit computer version or wind up having to suffer through a pretty terrible 2600 port. That is until AtariAge once again came to the rescue with a full re-production. *Millipede* is truly a joy to play with the 5200's Trak-Ball (yes, Atari spelled it with a "k"!) controller. The graphics and gameplay are spot on when compared to the original, with even the animated title screen re-created perfectly.



02

BALLBLAZER

» **RELEASE:** 1986
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** JOUST

03 ***Ballblazer* was one** of Lucasfilm Games' first titles. Taking full advantage of the 8-bit computer and 5200's scrolling capabilities, Lucasfilm managed to create a beautiful futuristic 3D 'soccer' match complete with continuous fractalised music. Because the partnership was such a big deal, Atari wanted to hold off the computer release to give the 5200 and then the 7800 some exclusivity. Unfortunately it wound up backfiring, and the company imploded during the interim, leaving 5200 owners having to wait until Jack Tramiel revived 5200 sales in 1986.

MS. PAC-MAN

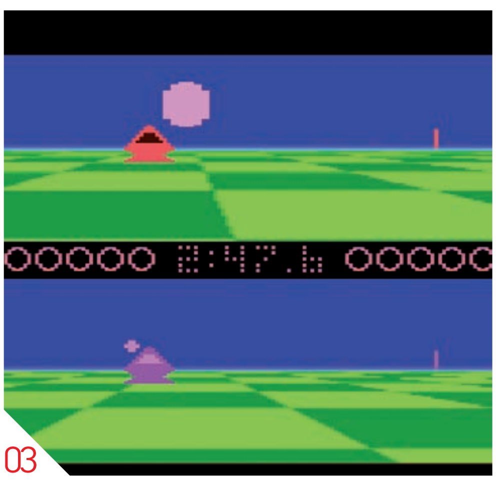
» **RELEASE:** 1983
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** MISSILE COMMAND

04 **What can be** said about this bow-wearing beauty that hasn't already been said? Well how about that the 5200 port is an extremely solid re-creation of her arcade appearance complete with all the fun intermission animations and different levels? This Atari conversion is a massive step up from the earlier-released *Pac-Man* for the 5200, as this time around the programmers concentrated more on re-creating the overall faithfulness of the arcade game rather than just the speed of the original. A very solid conversion that's definitely worth tracking down if you are a fan of the arcade version.

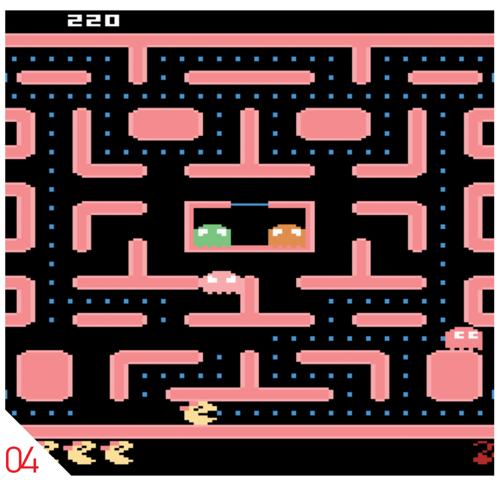
ROBOTRON: 2084

» **RELEASE:** 1983
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** SUPER BREAKOUT

05 **What can get** crazier than a session of Eugene Jarvis and Larry DeMar's classic in the arcade? How about a near-perfect port at home complete with dual joysticks? The 5200 version shipped with a special joystick coupler that enabled you to use both of the 5200's controllers to play the game as it was meant to be played. The looser feeling of the 5200's analogue sticks truly makes the fast multi-directional twitching a breeze to carry off. Some even like playing it on here better than the original. Another fantastic arcade conversion that 5200 collectors should immediately seek out.



03

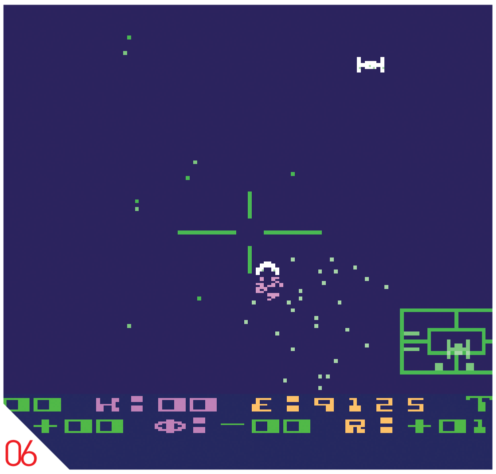


04

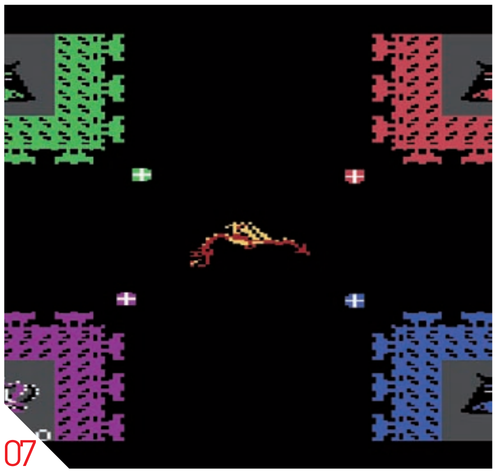


05

Due to unfortunate timing, the Atari 5200 didn't have the largest of catalogues. Fortunately both Atari (and later the homebrew community) released some truly fantastic games for it



06



07



08

STAR RAIDERS

» **RELEASE:** 1982
» **PUBLISHER:** ATARI
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** BATTLEZONE

06 **You simply can't** say you've experienced gaming on any Atari platform until you've spent time playing this classic. Designed for Atari's computer line in 1979 to show off their advanced capabilities, it was popular enough to later port to the Atari 2600, 5200, ST, and even inspire a graphic novel by DC comics. You're treated to a first-person view of a cockpit going through space, reminiscent of Exidy's Seventies classic *Star Fire*. With gameplay similar to the classic *Star Trek* text game, you go from sector to sector (via your trusty galactic chart) clearing each of those pesky Zylon ships.

CASTLE CRISIS

» **RELEASE:** 2004
» **PUBLISHER:** SELF-PUBLISHED
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** N/A

07 ***Castle Crisis* is** a homebrew game by veteran programmer Bryan Edewaard, and fans of the multiplayer coin-op favourite *Warlords* will be happy to learn this is a graphically arcade perfect port of that game, even though it doesn't share the same name. Which you would expect considering the arcade version ran on virtually identical hardware. The Atari 5200's analogue controllers are simply perfect for the precision needed to break out a pair of spinners, which is a problem that plagued many of the earlier ports of this game to other home consoles.

ADVENTURE II

» **RELEASE:** 2007
» **PUBLISHER:** SELF-PUBLISHED
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** KOFFI: YELLOW KOPTER

08 **No, this isn't** like Dana Marschz's *Hamlet 2*. Atari 5200 homebrewer extraordinaire Ron Lloyd managed to create a legitimate follow-up to the hit 2600 classic, to the point of Atari giving its blessing in exchange for using it to create a scaled-down 2600 version for their Flashback 2 console. Keeping the fun gameplay of the original but vastly updating the graphics, *Adventure II* also includes plenty of new locations and foes to test you. It's worth it to pick it up for the beautiful graphics alone, but the additional updates and expansions make this a fantastic game for the 5200.



09

KOFFI: YELLOW KOPTER

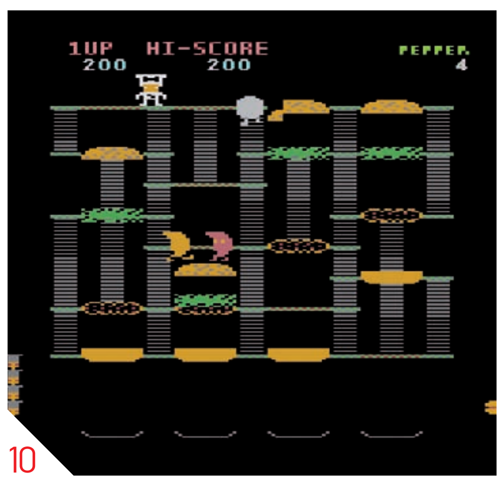
» **RELEASE:** 2002
» **PUBLISHER:** SELF-PUBLISHED
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** ADVENTURE II

09 **Another homebrew classic** by Ron Lloyd, this is a completely original game featuring a cartoonish yellow helicopter. Like a chopper version of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, Koffi is not allowed to go with the bigger rescue 'kopters' on missions. But when he learns of an insidious plan by Pyro the Storm Cloud to burn down the forests, Koffi flies into action to protect the woodland and the animals that live there. In a take on US Games' 'Name This Game' contest for its 2600 game release in 1982, AtariAge forum members were allowed to enter a contest to design one of the animals appearing in the game.

BEEF DROP

» **RELEASE:** 2004
» **PUBLISHER:** SELF-PUBLISHED
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** N/A

10 **Mattel was responsible** for porting Data East's coin-op classic *Burger Time* to the Intellivision (which is considered an excellent port), and its M-Network Publishing ported it to the Atari 2600, Apple II, and IBM PC. Unfortunately, the 5200 had zero chef love, which was a real shame. Thanks to Ken Siders, however, burger-loving 5200 owners can now build them all day long. Initially unveiled under the guise of an April Fool's joke surrounding a "found" prototype, Ken thankfully soon revealed that he had coded it up and was soon looking to publish it as the complete game. *Beef Drop* is the excellent end result.



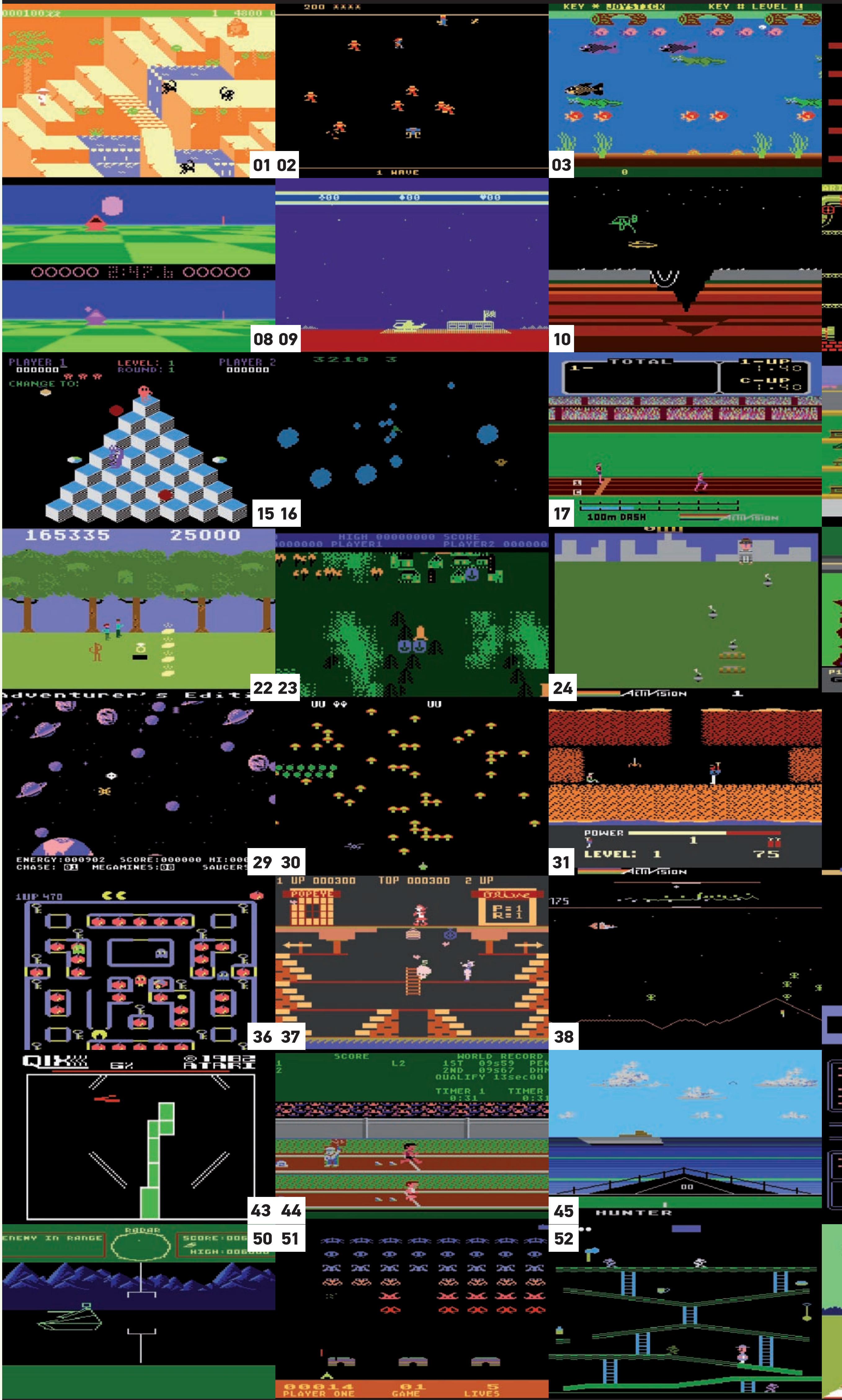
10

ATARI® 5200

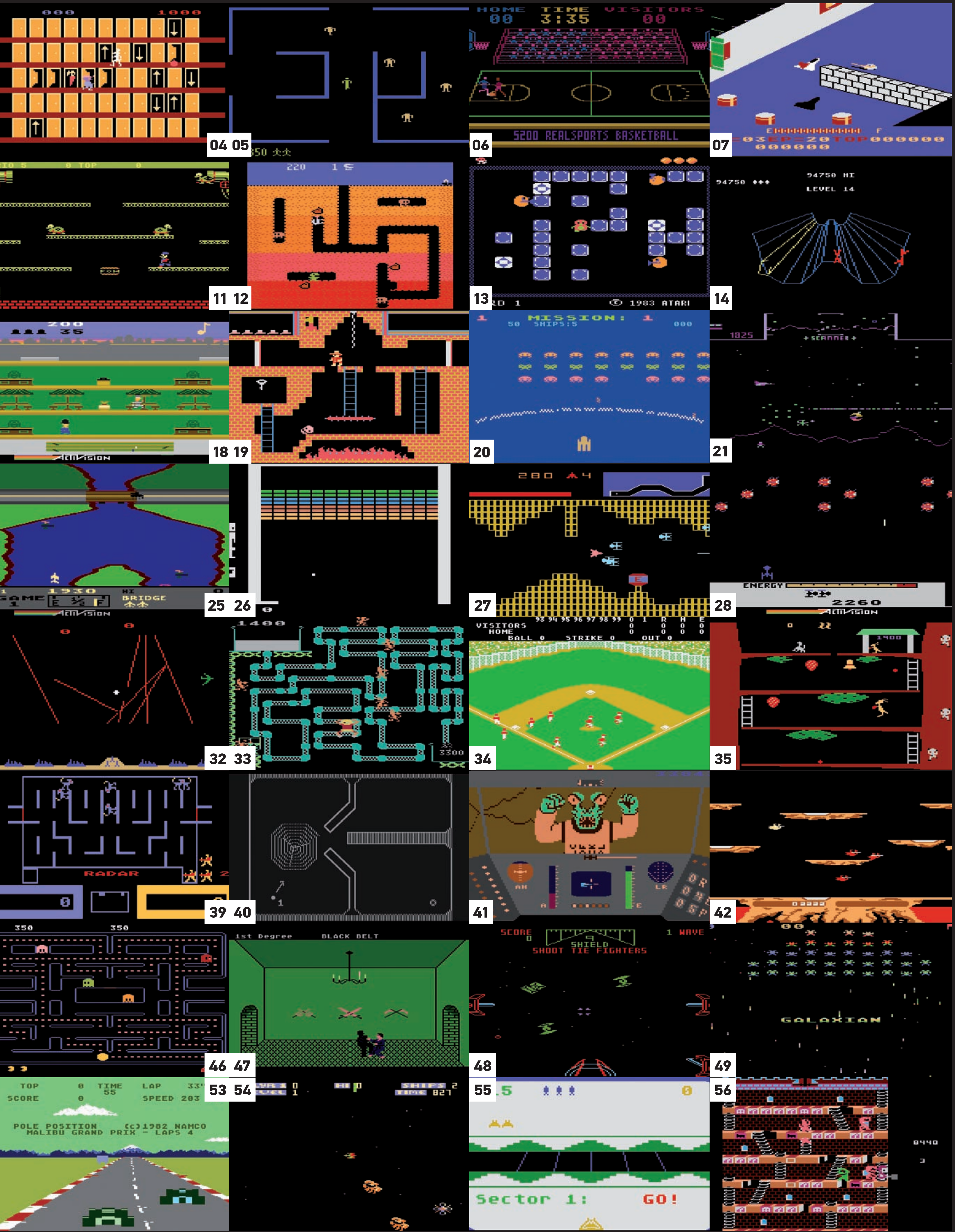
and the rest…

The Atari 5200's library of games may be small, but there are still plenty of great arcade conversions and original games to discover on it

01 CONGO BONGO
02 ROBOTRON: 2084
03 FROGGER II: THREEEDEEP!
04 LOONEY TUNES HOTEL
05 BERZERK
06 REALSPORTS BASKETBALL
07 ZAXXON
08 BALLBLAZER
09 CHOPLIFTER
10 JAMES BOND 007
11 MARIO BROS
12 DIG DUG
13 PENGO
14 TEMPEST
15 Q*BERT
16 ASTEROIDS
17 DECATHLON
18 KEYSTONE KAPERS
19 MONTEZUMA'S REVENGE
20 GORF
21 STARGATE
22 PITFALL II: THE LOST CAVERNS
23 COUNTERMEASURE
24 KABOOM!
25 RIVER RAID
26 SUPER BREAKOUT
27 VANGUARD
28 MEGAMANIA
29 ASTROCHASE
30 CENTIPEDE
31 H.E.R.O.
32 MISSILE COMMAND
33 FRISKY TOM
34 REALSPORTS BASEBALL
35 KANGAROO
36 SUPER PAC-MAN
37 POPEYE
38 DEFENDER
39 WIZARD OF WOR
40 MINIATURE GOLF
41 RESCUE ON FRACTALUS!
42 JOUST
43 QIX!
44 TRACK & FIELD
45 FINAL LEGACY
46 PAC-MAN
47 BLACK BELT
48 STAR WARS: THE ARCADE GAME
49 GALAXIAN
50 BATTLEZONE
51 SPACE INVADERS
52 MINER 2049ER
53 POLE POSITION
54 ZONE RANGER
55 BEAMRIDER
56 MR DO'S CASTLE

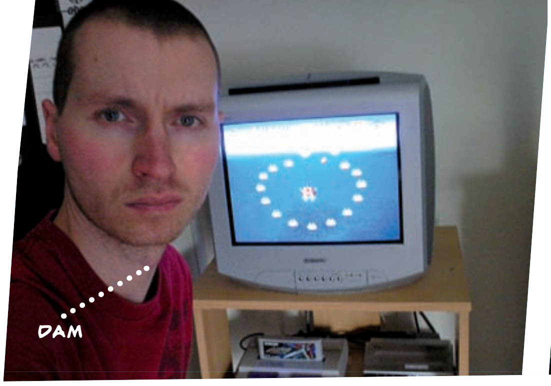


Screenshots courtesy of www.atariage.com



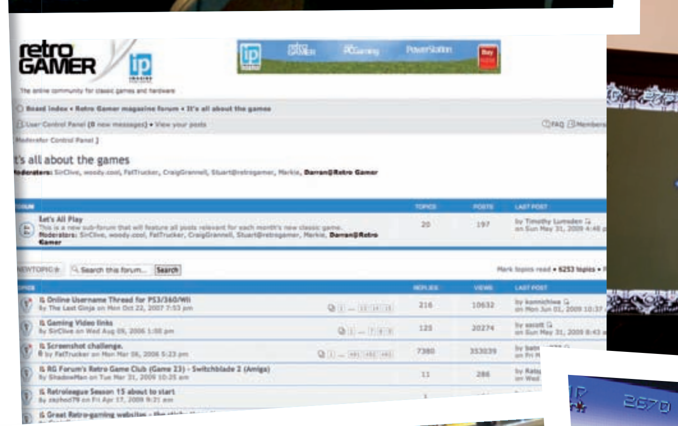
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© 1983 ATARI
14
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LEVEL 14
18 19
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MISSION: 1
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SCANNER
25 26
BRIDGE
ACTIVISION
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ENERGY
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ACTIVISION
32 33
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VISITORS
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BALL 0 STRIKE 0 OUT 0
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39 40
RADAR
41
42
46 47
1st Degree BLACK BELT
48
SHIELD
SHOOT TIE FIGHTERS
1 WAVE
49
GALAXIAN
53 54
TOP 0 TIME 55
SCORE 0 SPEED 203
LAP
POLE POSITION (C)1982 NAMCO
MALIBU GRAND PRIX - LAPS 4
SHIPS 2
55
Sector 1: GO!
56

Now that you know everything there is to know about Konami's classic shooter – turn to page 26 for our Ultimate Guide if you haven't yet – it's time to find out what the players on our forum thought of it. Gear up and take on the Armada of Annihilation with us…













LET'S ALL PLAY: AXELAY



INFO

Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house
First Released: 1992
Featured System: SNES

First impressions

Darran I'll never forget the first time I witnessed *Axelay* in all its glory. Being a huge Konami fan – its SNES stuff had been sensational – I had been hungrily consuming every last bit of information that was appearing and was still hungry for more. I'd seen the amazing screenshots that had been doing the rounds in various magazines, but that still didn't prepare me for the real deal. Seeing *Axelay* in action was a revelation and even today it still looks incredibly sexy.

Haventgottaclue My first impression was, 'How do you get out of that?' when I found myself surrounded by a circle of enemies early on in the first level. Having bought just a cart-only copy many years after its release, I didn't know that you could alter the angle of your bullets by holding down the fire button. It's actually a brilliant method of controlling your firing direction once you get the hang of it, and once I'd worked it out I really started to enjoy the game.

Roo My first impression was, 'Hey, that game looks immense!' I hope Nintendo Europe bring it out on Virtual Console soon! *Waits patiently*

elcarohw I remember being so blown away with the Mode 7 effects that I could not peel myself away from the television.

tssk I played this late in the day so my first impressions were that the 3D was a little flat. However it did stand out as being incredibly colourful. Oh, and it used the *Gradius* font! Does this make it part of the *Gradius*/*Scramble* canon?



thevulture Do you mean before or after I picked my jaw up off the floor? I remember watching a friend of mine playing it. The first thing I saw was that molten lava boss creature. It just looked bloody gorgeous. It was fantastic use of the SNES hardware and I remember being rather bloody jealous at the time – I was a Mega Drive owner.

thl Absolutely breathtaking! It felt like an equivalent of when *Gradius* meets *Aleste*. I had never seen a shoot-'em-up game that used a mixture of vertical and horizontal side scrolling. Graphics-wise it looks incredible, and I was blown away by the sheer excellence of Mode 7.

Best power-up

Darran I'm sure this is going to come up a lot, but the Vulcan Cannon was a genius piece of weapon design and I'm still impressed with the simplicity of its mechanics. You have two streams of fire on either side of your ship and you can change their direction by simply







★ GO DEEPER: TRIVIA TRAIL

» Fans of *Axelay's* D117B fighter will be pleased to hear that it's available as an unlockable ship in the PS2's *Airforce Delta Strike*.

» *Axelay* was released on the US Virtual Console in 2007 and the Japanese in 2008, but we're still waiting for a UK release. Grr.

» *Axelay's* superb musical score is by Taro Kudou. He also helped compose the excellent soundtrack for *Super Castlevania IV*.

» Kazuhiko Ishida worked on *Axelay* as a support programmer. He later left Konami along with several other developers there to form Treasure.

holding and depressing the fire button. It's an amazing idea that really comes into its own on the first stage, as you'll often get completely surrounded by enemies. Another nice touch is the actual weapon system itself. Unlike similar games, you choose your weapons at the beginning and then simply alternate between the three you've picked. There are no power-ups and should you take a hit you'll most likely lose the currently equipped weapon, rather than completely burst into flames. It's a great system that Treasure would expand upon in the Saturn's *Radiant Silvergun*.



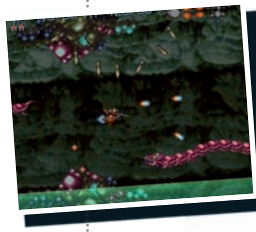
nakamura Well that is easy. The Vulcan Cannon that you can spin around your ship. It is available on Level 1 and you need it throughout. The Wind Laser on Level 6 is handy too.

tssk *Axelay* doesn't really have power-ups. It's more like weapon loadouts at the start of each level. And as the others have said, the swivel cannon you get straight from the start is the best.

Powerful, flexible, and the only thing it doesn't do is shoot straight ahead. Then again the only thing directly in front of you tends to be bullets or missiles, so this is a plus!

HEAVYface I'm a fan of the big missiles and Needle Cracker, but you only really need the 360 gun, even though it looks like you're firing Tic Tacs.

Mayhem Easily the Round Vulcan – I have the SFC version! – as it is so versatile and useful in most situations. After that the Wind Laser, but you don't get that until late on.



Best boss

Darran Trying to choose a best boss in *Axelay* is nearly as impossible as choosing your favourite child. Each and every one is utterly fantastic, from their design to their clever attack patterns. The phenomenal-looking Wayler – or the lava boss to the less informed – is arguably the most impressive, but let's not forget the ED-209 lookalike that awaits you at the end of Stage 2, or the cool mechanical spider that lies in wait at the end of the very first stage. Add in some very decent sub-bosses that can be found halfway through most stages and you have a graphical tour de force of mayors that have still never been beaten by any other 16-bit console.

Dam That's a hard question because they are all very different, and I think they are all awesome. Except for the last one because I can't beat it!

tssk There's a reason why the massive walker boss is always shown in screenshots of this game. He's the standout. The final boss deserves mention for almost catching you off-guard when you think it's over.

JetSetWilly Never got to the last boss, so I can't comment on that. So, I'm going to go with ED-209's younger brother, the devious little git.

HEAVYface Level 4 boss is the best; he drops off the ceiling into the water, bringing half the cave and some jazzy flute with him. You shoot him in the dew stick until he thrusts forward his massive pink knobbly alien weak spot, all the time dodging his babies and purple hot plasma string. Awesome.

Best level

Darran *Axelay* is full of great level design and it would be all too easy to rave about the excellent 'into the screen' stages. Instead, however, I'm going to focus on Level 4, a beautiful aquatic world that looks simply sensational. The level design here is immense, with plenty of cleverly placed enemies, your craft slowing down whenever you have to go underwater, and some truly beautiful music. The boss is something of a letdown compared to the stress you have to go through in order to reach him, but it's nevertheless a satisfying conclusion to a truly epic stage.

nakamura Level 4, the underwater level. Has a very claustrophobic feel to it, slow-paced, and requires a lot of patience to get through, the little jellybean things being the biggest pain. The music is the winner, though. On this level it is epic, especially the brilliant echo effect applied to it. Great boss also; gives you very little room to manoeuvre, plus a weapon-changing beam to make things tricky. Great level.

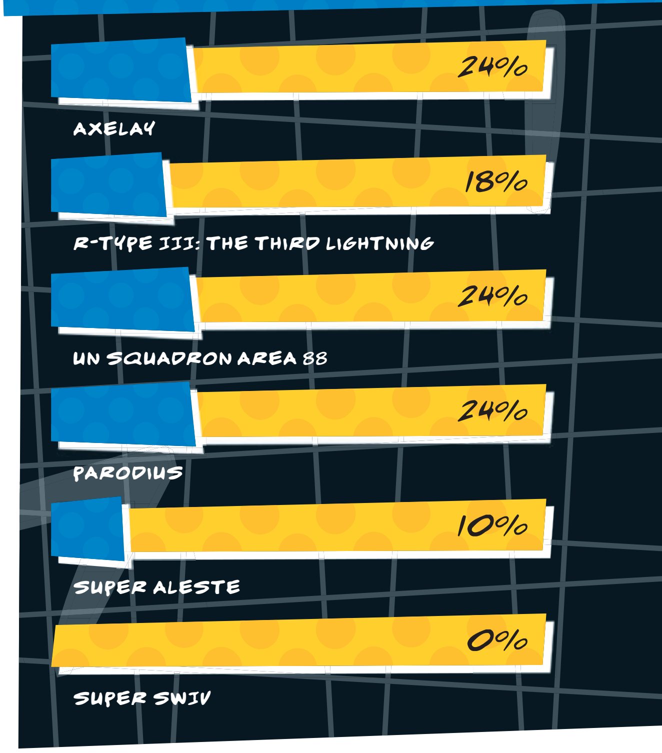
tssk I really enjoyed the sideways space level. Usually these feel too empty but the frantic pace of having to dive between capital ships while dodging fire and engines took me right back to the days of watching *Robotech* on a Saturday morning.

HEAVYface Level 6 without question. There is just so much going on, and so many changes of pace in it. It's one of the greatest shooter levels ever made. From beginning to end, the kind of cool massive stuff that up until then only appeared in the arcades.

Mayhem Probably the first, just for setting the scene, getting the player into the flow of the game and then launching a quite memorable boss at you.

FORUM POLL

This month: Best SNES Shooter



LET'S ALL PLAY: AXELAY

Stuart Cripes! Where to start? This is a game where every level and every boss is memorable, which is where the majority of *Axelay*'s charm comes from, in my opinion. I think for me, though, the second stage best encapsulates what makes the game so good, despite being one of the stages that doesn't show off the game's iconic Mode 7 cylindrical scrolling. The second stage is the first side-scrolling stage you play, so comes as a nice surprise. It's epic in feel, too, with plenty of tricky sections to navigate and a wide variety of enemies to blast. The level then ends with one of *Axelay*'s most memorable bosses: the ED-209-influenced T-36 Towbar. Add some great music to this stage and you have the recipe for one of the greatest shmup levels ever created.



Why it's a classic

Darran There's no denying that *Axelay* is an incredibly tough game to get to grips with, but once you pass that difficulty barrier you'll discover a rewarding experience. Many people dismiss *Axelay* as being style over substance, but this is certainly not the case. *Axelay* may be pretty, but there's some exceptionally solid level design and clever gameplay mechanics under all the pseudo 3D glitz. It's a masterful game that just keeps getting better with age.

nakamura Because it mixes style and substance very nicely. It is short, yes, but rather tricky too. The mix of 2D and 3D levels was a great idea and it has a simple but nice story. The levels feel large in depth, very wide on the 3D levels, which makes it feel a little freer than other shooters. Great music; the best music, in fact. Great graphics also.

thesubcon3 It's gotta be the weapon upgrade system. Instead of collecting weapons from enemies, you power up as you progress further in the game. To me that makes it much more rewarding.

HEAVYface It's the little touches like Axelay taking out baddies with its shrapnel when you die, the fact that explosions chain up to destroy enemies in the vicinity, little background details like electricity arcing on the destroyed space stations on Level 2. Despite the sprite flicker, there is loads of cool tech stuff going on, like the amount of parallax backgrounds on Level 2 and 6, the wavy underwater effects. The absolute mastery of the SNES sound chip by Konami.

Timothy Lumsden How many 16-bit games made your eyes feel like Barry White had made sweet, sweet love to them? This was one of them.

Josh128 Why is it a classic? Let me count the ways. 1) Variety: Just like the old *Life Force*, here you have alternating vertical and side-scrolling levels, with the vertical levels making excellent use of the SNES Mode 7 to deliver a never-before-seen 3D scrolling effect. 2) Graphics: This was one of the first SNES shooters that by and large managed to overcome the dreaded slowdown that plagued many early SNES titles. It was a technological marvel in the graphics department with scrolling, warping, scaling and rotation of enemies and backgrounds. 3) Audio:



» [SNES] If you want an example of gob-smacking Mode 7 visuals then check out the fifth stage of *Axelay*. It's delicious.



CLASSIC GAME? YOU MUST BE JOKING

Just because a game's praised, it doesn't mean that everyone is going to like it…

"GREAT GRAPHICS AND SOUND BUT TOO HARD TO BE A CLASSIC."
GMAN72

"WHILE I DO REALLY ENJOY THE GAME, THE BACKGROUND ON THE FIRST LEVEL NEVER FAILS TO GIVE ME A HEADACHE."
CAUTERIZE

"IT'S UNDERWHELMING. A GAME HYPED BY ITS PLAYERS SINCE RELEASE, DESPITE MEDIOCRE REVIEWS."
RALPH MILNE'S LEFT FOOT

FURTHER PLAY

Similar titles you may want to try



RADIANT SILVERGUN

FEATURED SYSTEM: SATURN
YEAR RELEASED: 1998

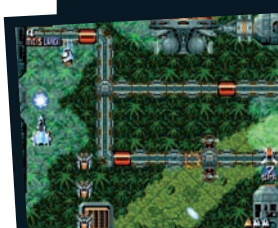
Designed by the same coders as *Axelay*, it should come as no surprise to learn that both titles share plenty of similarities. More a boss rush as opposed to a traditional shooter, *Radiant Silvergun* features gorgeous visuals, incredible-looking bosses, and truly spectacular music. An instant classic that every shmup fan needs in their collection, even with its high £100 price tag.



SALAMANDER

FEATURED SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR RELEASED: 1986

Does *Axelay*'s font mean that it's part of the *Gradius* canon? We'll possibly never know, but we're guessing that the idea for vertical and horizontal stages was definitely lifted from Konami's older blaster. Think *Gradius* but with non-selectable power-ups and an organic, creepy theme that's more reminiscent of Irem's *R-Type* and you have another fantastic blaster that will test your reflexes to the limit.



SUPER ALESTE

FEATURED SYSTEM: SNES
YEAR RELEASED: 1992

Compile made some wonderful shooters over the years and *Super Aleste* is no exception. Incredibly hectic and with plenty of neat graphical effects, it's perfect proof that slowdown on the SNES could be abolished if the coding was clever enough. Boasting great bosses and smart power-ups, it's a brilliant shooter that shouldn't be missed. Go for the Japanese version as it boasts more extras.



THUNDER FORCE IV

FEATURED SYSTEM: MEGA DRIVE
YEAR RELEASED: 1992

If *Axelay* represents one of the best shooters on the SNES, then you may want to check out the equivalent on the Mega Drive. The last *Thunder Force* to appear on the system is a graphical masterpiece that boasts amazing bosses, stunning music, awesome weapons and the ability to choose your starting stage. It may lack *Axelay*'s vertical stages, but it's still an astoundingly good shooter.

MOMENTS IN TIME

The points in your mission when you realise that you're playing a classic

1 WE'RE SURROUNDED!

No sooner have you started the game are you surrounded. If you didn't read the instructions then it's quite possible that you're going to die a rather quick death. If you did read the manual you'll have already discovered the Vulcan Cannon and used it to get out of what would have been an incredibly sticky situation. Take all the fighters out so you can gawp at *Axelay*'s stunning visuals.





2 INCEY WINCEY SPIDER

The first boss gives a good indication of the quality you can expect to find throughout the rest of *Axelay*'s running time. It's not only massive but is beautifully animated to the point that it almost feels alive. Avoid the web it shoots at you and the smaller spiders and keep blasting it until it finally explodes.

3 WATER SPORTS

Often ignored because it doesn't feature vertical scrolling, *Axelay*'s fourth stage still has plenty of fantastic moments. The audio is incredible, eclipsing the rest of the exceptional soundtrack, while the level design is nice and tight and creates a sense of claustrophobia. Enemies come thick and fast, while the mayor at the end of the stage literally brings the roof down.





4 FLAME ON

Yes, it's a cliche to make a big deal about Wayler, but he really is incredible. Coming out of the lava arms-first, he's an absolutely spectacular sight and puts up a pretty stiff fight as well. Using his huge hands to pummel your ship into oblivion, he's a spectacular-looking boss and perfectly sums up why we love *Axelay* so much.

5 SECOND COMING?

It's hard enough completing *Axelay* once, but if you manage to finish a second run through you'll be treated to a rather sad message. The final image bears the epitaph: 'See you again at *Axelay 2*'. 18 years later and we're still waiting for that sequel to appear. Come on, Treasure! Team up with Konami again and do another collaboration like you did for *Gradius V*!



Need I explain this? Some of the most intriguing and complex music tracks ever to be pumped out of the SNES's SPC 700 sound chip. Eerie, echoing sound effects added to music tracks that built up from a slow simmer to an all-out rolling boil, perfectly matching the levels they were created for. 3) Gameplay: Of course, all of the above mean nothing without crisp controls, awesome weapons, and perfect challenge. *Axelay* had all three. *Axelay* had the added element of causing you to lose your current weapon when you took a hit, which called for a shift in strategy. Best of all, this was a game that could be beaten. It was difficult, but not frustratingly difficult. A true classic!



Graedient It's the only shooter I like. I put that down to the graphical amazingness. I literally sat open-mouthed watching my friend play it.

tekaotaku *Axelay*? Why it's a classic? Because it's just f*cking brilliant!!

Best moment

Stuart It has to be Wayler, the lava boss of Level 5 with the dodgy ticker. That boss encounter is just epic from beginning to end, and anyone who has experienced it instantly associates it with *Axelay* for that reason. It's such a great section of the game. Taking up virtually the entirety of the screen to give you hardly any room to manoeuvre, you know you're in for a tough time of it. But then he starts trying to swat you with his giant fiery arms and that's when things really start to heat up.

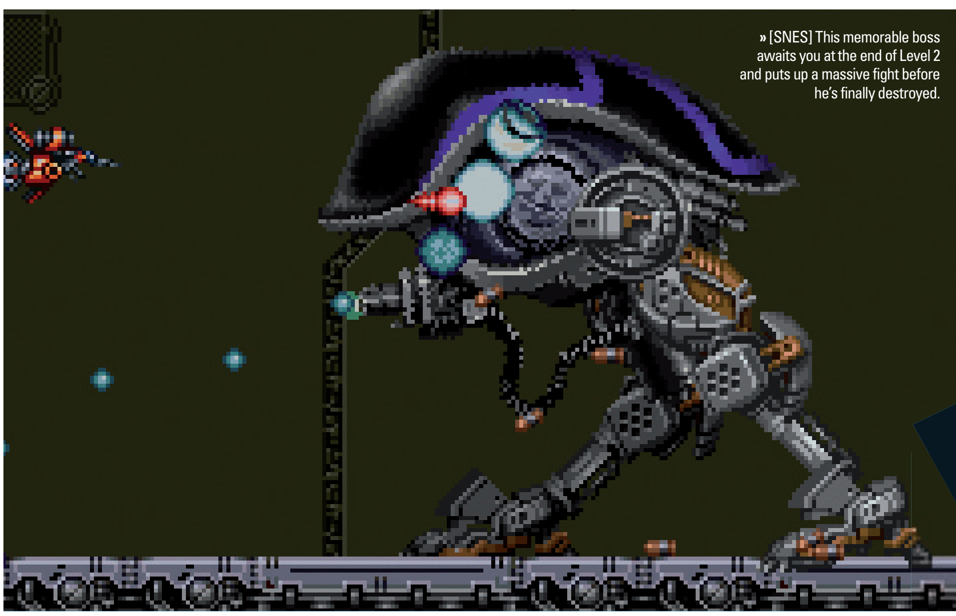
nakamura Well it is a short game, so it would be easy to say all – and right, in fact. To pick one moment, however, is trickier, but I would have to give it to the entrance to the final boss's lair. It is completely dark; there is a small walker with a beam of light shining on you, firing off the odd bullet. The music builds beautifully along with the tension of being in a very tight cave. It feels like you are going to die, and if you aren't fast, you will.

mainvein Lots of standout moments for me, but the introduction of ED-209 is the best. Love the way it powers up and walks backwards and you just have to follow it until it decides to attack. Top stuff.

Smurph I'm tempted to say the very start, as you see the Mode 7 effect for the first time, and the brilliant tune starts up, but I'd probably say the introduction of the lava boss – he knows how to make an entrance, the big show-off. Better blast his face off.

thl Flying through clouds and passing the rocks in Level 1. Also hovering over the city in Level 3 was something special as it looks illuminating and does create that amazing night scenery.

nokgod For me, it's the start of Level 5. Just as you get going, an enormous lava worm comes leaping into the air from the background to try to take you down. It then dives back down and submerges itself, right in the foreground. It left me amazed at the grand sense of scale!



» [SNES] This memorable boss awaits you at the end of Level 2 and puts up a massive fight before he's finally destroyed.



NEXT MONTH'S GAME

SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

Want to join in the fun? Then head on over to **www.retrogamer.net/forum** now.

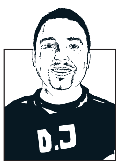
High-Score 1000

Score 100

Cylon Attack

THERE ARE MANY COPIES…

RETROREVIVAL



» BBC MICRO
» A&F SOFTWARE
» 1983

Once upon a time, the creative philosophy of the videogame industry was: 'If you can get away with it, do it.' This cheerful attitude allowed budding developers to either rip off classic arcade games wholesale, or even cash in on popular films and TV shows.

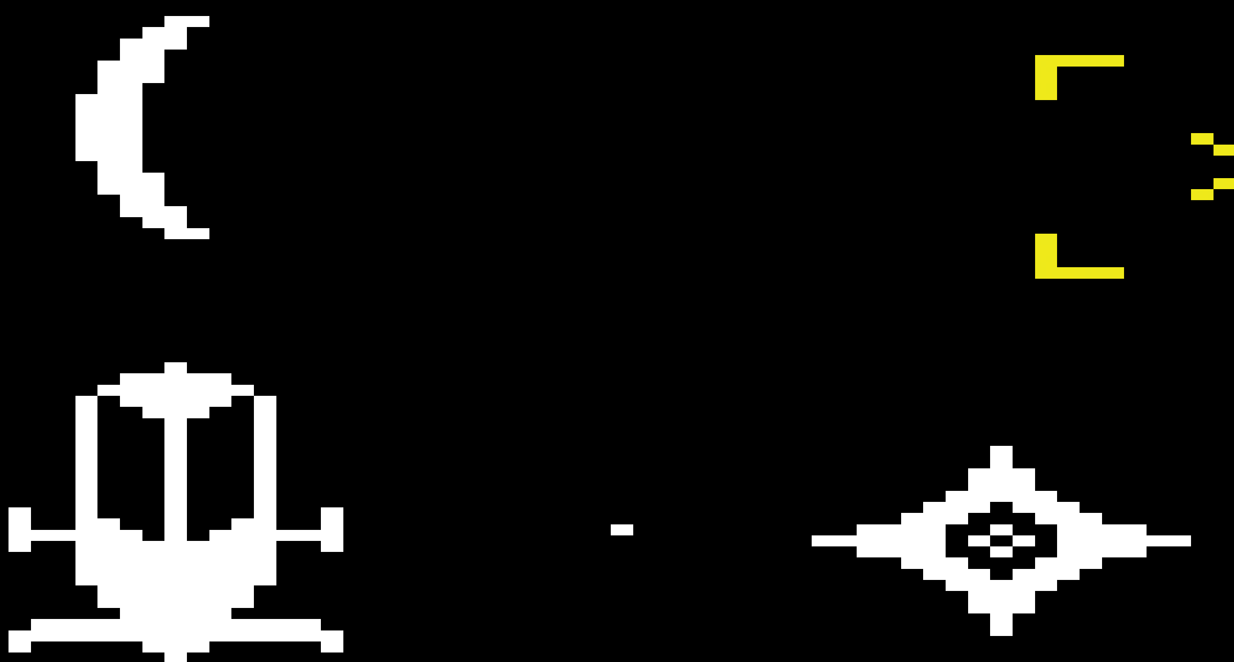
This is never more apparent than when playing Doug Anderson's wonderful BBC game *Cylon Attack*. Released in 1983, you only have to look at the ship designs to realise where the inspiration for Anderson's game came from – although the title itself kind of gives the game away, being that identical ships with the same names chased humanity across the stars in *Battlestar Galactica*.

Taking control of a lone fighter, your mission is to simply see off wave after wave of enemy fighters. Utilising the same first-person view as *Star Wars*, you control an on-screen cursor and blast the hell out of anything foolish enough to drift into your sights.

Although *Cylon Attack* is an all-out blaster, Anderson included plenty of interesting game mechanics to help keep the action fresh and exciting. The most interesting of these is the inclusion of a fuel bar, meaning that later waves require you to refuel or risk the loss of your spaceship. Fuelling is made even trickier because approaching Cylons will then attack your mothership, which only has a set amount of shield energy and must be kept in one piece. Fortunately, you'll automatically dock once you approach for a fuel top-up, but lay off the firing, as a twitchy trigger finger can spell disaster.

While *Cylon Attack* hasn't aged quite as gracefully as similar shooters such as *3D Starstrike* or the aforementioned *Star Wars*, it's easy to see why it was so popular with BBC owners back in the day. The action is quick and constant, everything scrolls along nice and smoothly, and it requires plenty of cunning on its later stages.

Oh, and if you were lucky and skilled enough to win the £200 prize that was offered to whoever achieved the highest score in the game then drop us an email. We'd love to hear from you. *




Mother ship
— status —
Shield
Fuel:



IN THE KNOW

- **» Name:** Ikari Warriors
- **» Released:** 1986
- **» Publisher:** SNK/Tradewest
- **» Developer:** SNK
- **» Price:** £100-200
- **» By The Same Developer:** *Beast Busters, Fatal Fury*



COIN-OP CAPERS

#7 Ikari Warriors

We take a definitive look back at a classic arcade game and unravel its brilliance through those who know it best



I*kari Warriors* is seen by many as SNK's answer to *Commando,* Capcom's smash hit from 1985. Both titles are vertically scrolling shooters and feature almost identical gameplay, with the player forging deep into enemy territory, firing guns and flinging grenades at anything that moves. What sets *Ikari Warriors* apart from *Commando* is its two-player mode, allowing you and a pal to go gun crazy together; and its novel rotary joysticks, which let you independently walk and shoot in eight different directions. You can also take control of tanks and gleefully mow down enemy soldiers. Elite Systems, the software house that converted both games to home computers in the UK, summed it up nicely when it said that *Ikari Warriors* was essentially "*Commando* with knobs on". And rotating knobs at that.

The game may be a *Commando* clone, yet it has its own lineage within SNK. The game is actually a sequel of sorts to *TNK III* (1985), SNK's first game to use rotary joysticks. In *TNK III*, you take control of a tank and there's no on-foot combat, but the top-down visual style and basic gameplay clearly identify it as the forerunner to *Ikari Warriors*. The explicit link between the two games is Ralf Jones, the unseen tank driver in *TNK III* who returns in *Ikari Warriors* as a *Rambo*-inspired, bandana-wearing badass – he is partnered with future *King Of Fighters* team-mate Clark Still when a second player pops in a credit.

Ralf and Clark's mission is to rescue an imprisoned colonel from an enemy stronghold. In Japan, the game was released as *Ikari*, which means 'anger', whereas in the West, 'Ikari' was reassigned as the name of the village where the colonel is being held. The games themselves are identical, except for one fascinating detail: in the Japanese original, when you reach the end of the game you enter a base with swastikas engraved on the floor, revealing that you're fighting against an army of jungle-dwelling neo-Nazis. Tradewest, which distributed the game in the West, obviously felt it wise to remove all Nazi symbols and feature a random guerrilla outfit instead.

Adopting a strict no guts, no glory policy, Ralf and Clark have gone on to become SNK stalwarts, starring in two *Ikari Warriors* sequels – *Victory Road* (1986) and *Ikari III: The Rescue* (1989) – and later joining the *King Of Fighters* roster. More recently, the pair have appeared as playable characters in the *Metal Slug* series. However, it's as the shirtless mercenaries from *Ikari Warriors* that most gamers will remember them, largely because the game was converted to every popular computer and console format of the time.

The first home computer versions appeared on the Commodore 64 and PC, courtesy of Data East and Quicksilver Software. These were followed by a version for the Famicom/NES, developed by Micronics, which introduced separate stages and a few new additions. In the UK, the aforementioned Elite Systems picked up the rights to *Ikari Warriors* and set about converting it to the Amstrad CPC, ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. The Amstrad version appeared first, to much acclaim, but the Spectrum and C64 versions suffered from lengthy delays and didn't arrive until March 1988. Elite was also responsible for the Amiga and Atari ST versions, and thanks to the more powerful hardware, they were the first to accurately replicate the coin-op's look and feel, albeit without the rotary controls. Proving that *Ikari Warriors* still had appeal, Atari released the game for its 7800 console in 1990, and even bothered to put out a version for the archaic Atari 2600.

For the past 20 years there has been surprisingly little action on the *Ikari Warriors* front. Elite Systems re-licensed the game in 2004 and put it out on mobile phones, but the big news occurred earlier this year when it was revealed that SNK is prepping a collection of its pre-Neo-Geo arcade titles. Dubbed *SNK Arcade Classics Volume 0*, the centrepieces of the compilation are *Ikari Warriors* and its sequels. Fans will be crossing their fingers that the updates utilise twin-stick controls in an effort to emulate the proper *Ikari* experience. *







Completing Ikari Warriors is no cakewalk, but Charles Bingham can do it in style. We speak to the man whose personal best points tally far exceeds the Twin Galaxies official high score

PROFILE

» **Name:** Charles Bingham
» **Age:** 35
» **Date of birth:** 29 January 1975
» **Hometown:** Dexter, Maine, USA
» **Current World Records:** *Super Punch-Out!!* [Arcade] 1,118,050 points

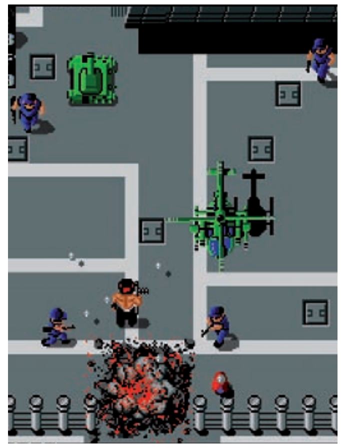


■ How did your relationship with *Ikari Warriors* begin?
There was an *Ikari Warriors* machine at the local laundromat when I was 11 years old, in 1986. I tried it a few times and didn't really care for it. Shooting games were never really my cup of tea. I was more interested in one-on-one fighting games like *Punch-Out!!* and *Karate Champ*. One time when I went to the laundromat I saw my friend Corey Dodge there playing *Ikari Warriors*. I'd known Corey all my life, so I went over to say hello. I started watching his game, because he was way up in an area that I'd never seen before, and he just kept going. I'd never seen anyone get very far in the game before. *Ikari Warriors* was the only arcade game that Corey ever showed much interest in, and he was extremely good at it. However, he never beat the game back then, which is something he always wanted to do. Fast forward about 20 years: I already owned one arcade machine – *Super Punch-Out!!*, which is my 'holy grail' – and I was thinking about getting another one. I wanted *Ikari Warriors* because, even though I didn't care much for it as a kid, I'd since come to appreciate it through MAME. The problem with playing it in MAME on my PC was the lack of rotary joysticks. Also, there was the nostalgia factor, and I knew Corey would get a charge out of it. I figured it would give him a chance to finally beat the game, and maybe I could get good at it myself.

■ So once you acquired the arcade machine, how good did you get?
My highest score is 1,532,300, while Corey's personal best is 1,571,100. Both of our scores are substantially higher than the Twin Galaxies record of 1,414,500, set by Walt Price in 1987.



» Photo evidence of Charles' personal best high score of 1,532,300 points.


» [Arcade] Respect is due if you are able tp get this far without cheating.

[Since this interview was conducted, Noah J Banwarth of Marion, Iowa, broke the Twin Galaxies record with a verified score of 1,445,600 points.]

■ How long did it take you to beat the Twin Galaxies high score?
It took me a few months of playing regularly to beat the game, and it took perhaps another month to beat the Twin Galaxies high score. It helped that Corey was coming over daily at the time, because I could learn from watching him play. We use the Twin Galaxies DIP switch settings, which include no continues. Under such settings, to get scores like that, you have to not only beat the game on one credit, but you have to do a lot of 'point pressing' along the way, usually in pretty hairy spots. You can only point press in any one area for so long because if you hang about the game fires missiles at you. Beating the game without doing any point pressing results in a score in the 1,350,000 range.

■ What's the most difficult section of the game to get through?
The final area of the final stage is the most difficult part of the game. Not only do you have swarms of suicide bombers with red grenades coming at you from all directions, but you also have four turrets up ahead that send out a nearly unavoidable hail of machine gun fire before you can get within grenade range. If you have long-range red bullets at this point you are in luck, because red bullets can take out machinery, and with long-range, you can do it from outside of their firing range. However, the only way

Know Your Enemy

Standing between you and victory is an enemy army hell bent on destruction

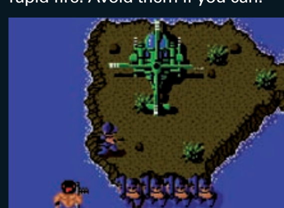
Grunts
You'll encounters hundreds of these low-level foot soldiers on your mission. We hope the enemy brought plenty of body bags.





Rock Monsters
What are these things? Arrow-spitting rock monsters from another dimension, or elaborate bunkers? We say rock monsters!

Choppers
First encountered midway through the game, these choppers try to take you down with their rapid fire. Avoid them if you can.





Tanks
These large tanks guard the enemy stronghold and can be pretty deadly. Ping a few grenades in their direction to take them out.

Zombie Boss
This brain-dead boss is hooked up to some heavy artillery. However, with his defences down he splats very easily.





you would have long-range red bullets at this point would be if you had made it through the entire last half without getting killed, as the last place to pick up upgrades is about halfway through. This is possible, but very difficult.

■ Is it easier to get a high score when playing with another player?
The conventional wisdom is that *Ikari Warriors* and similar games are easier with two players, because each player has less enemies to deal with. In practice, I think it is more difficult with two players, because the differing playing styles will often clash. For example, the screen will not scroll forward if the other player is lagging behind, so you could be walking, expecting the screen to scroll forward as usual, and when it doesn't, you could find yourself in the line of fire. Additionally, under the default settings, the other player's weapons can kill you, so you have to watch out for that as well.

■ Are you planning to submit your scores to Twin Galaxies?
I would like to eventually, and I think Corey would too. I currently don't have a video camera and tripod, so that's the main obstacle. Also, even though I can beat the top Twin Galaxies score easily, matching or exceeding my personal best score is a lot more difficult, and may take a day's worth of attempts, or it may not happen at all. I wouldn't want to submit a score that was substantially less than my personal best. However, I have gone through the Twin Galaxies submission process before with *Super Punch-Out!!*, so there's a good chance I'll do it again for *Ikari Warriors*. ✱

CHARLES' SURVIVAL GUIDE

Top tips to help you blaze through the game without suffering so much as a stubbed toe

1 ■ CROWD CONTROL
Try to kill the enemies in groups. This will double the points compared to killing them individually. There are two ways to kill multiple enemies at once. One is with a grenade and the other is with red bullets. Red bullets keep going when they hit an enemy soldier, so if there are multiple soldiers lined up, one shot will kill them all.

2 ■ ADVANCE AND RETREAT
Keep your distance from the enemies. Some of the enemies, especially in the latter stages of the game, have upgraded (red) grenades, but they always have standard black short-range bullets. When facing a lot of enemies up ahead, move in for your shots and then quickly back out of range of their shots.

3 ■ SHORT SHIFT
It is best to avoid the 'S' (short-range) upgrade, as it will reduce your firing range if you have the default bullets. The only advantage of short-range fire is that it allows for a slightly higher firing rate. In general, longer range fire is a greater advantage than a slightly faster rate of fire.

4 ■ TIMER DELAY
The game only allows a certain number of large explosions from red grenades on screen at any given time, and explosions from your own red grenades are given precedence over explosions launched by enemies' grenades. If you don't have time to get out of the way of enemy grenades or missiles, start rapidly throwing your own red grenades because your explosions take priority, and you can be well out of danger by the time the enemy explosions get around to going off.

the sequels

SNK was keen to capitalise on the success of Ikari Warriors…



Victory Road

Released: 1986

The sequel was rushed out in double-quick time and SNK basically did it all wrong. Ralf and Clark return, but this time they're flipped into some bizarre, sci-fi universe. The first few seconds sum up the game perfectly: there's a 'Wow!' moment when you see that you're armed with a powerful new flamethrower weapon, quickly followed by a 'What the?!' moment when you realise that you're fighting against silly space aliens who bounce around making blip-blip noises. Someone really needed to tell SNK that zapping little green men is nowhere near as much fun as gunning it out with flesh-and-blood foreigners. There are no tanks to nip into either! The one welcome addition is a series of boss battles, but they're repetitive and frustrating. If you do manage to make it to the end, you're presented with a daft 'Engrish' message, which tries to explain some of the weirdness: "You have fighted well to last stage. Thanks. All devils have gone to the world where they should stay." Let's hope so!



Guerrilla War

Released: 1987

Although not a sequel to the original *Ikari Warriors*, this spin-off works much better as a follow-up than *Victory Road*. In Japan the game was titled *Guevara*, and featured Marxist revolutionaries Che Guevara and Fidel Castro as the two playable characters. For its Western release, SNK unsurprisingly renamed it and removed the political angle. The two soldiers, therefore, might as well be Ralf and Clark, as this plays very much like an *Ikari* game. Key differences are the graphics, which are larger and more detailed, and the introduction of a bigger playing area, which scrolls horizontally as well as vertically. The drivable tanks also make a welcome return, making this the best (non) sequel to *Ikari Warriors*.



Ikari III: The Rescue

Released: 1989

It's ironic that the first follow-up to bear the *Ikari* name isn't really an *Ikari Warriors* game at all. The eight-way rotary controls are present, but the display is now aligned horizontally rather than vertically. The biggest change, though, is the gameplay, which has wandered off into beat-'em-up land. Cue Ralf and Clark kicking lots of people in the head, and only occasionally grabbing a gun as a bonus weapon. If Stallone's *Rambo* was the inspiration for the original game, then it would appear that the creators were watching lots of Van Damme flicks when they concocted this martial arts effort, which probably says it all really. It's actually a decent enough game, and smashing skulls is a lot of fun, but it's a bit out of place in this series.

COIN-OP CAPERS

the machine

In order to get so good at Ikari Warriors, Charles Bingham acquired the original arcade version of the game. We invited him to show off his cab



Although Charles was on the lookout for an *Ikari Warriors* machine, he ultimately stumbled upon one by chance in the summer of 2006. He says: "I was on an arcade-related internet forum and I saw a post from an arcade operator here in Maine that was looking to get rid of some of his old stuff. I decided to drive down there to see what he had. Imagine my surprise when I walked in there and the first machine I saw was a working *Ikari Warriors*. I gave him $120 and loaded it into my truck. Cosmetically, the machine is rough. The side art is torn, as is the vinyl that covers the sides. Also, a lot of the particle board material is worn away from the bottom front corners. However, the cabinet is solid overall, with no water damage, and everything works."



JAMMA CONNECTOR



I thought it would be nice to be able to play some of the other rotary games in my cabinet, like *Victory Road* and *Guerrilla War*. The only problem was that most of them are JAMMA pinout games. So I got a 56-pin Molex card edge connector and wired it according to the JAMMA pinout, in parallel with the 44-pin SNK pinout Molex card edge connector that I'd installed earlier. This allows me to easily swap a JAMMA game board into the cabinet. In addition to *Ikari Warriors*, I have four other rotary games that I use in the cabinet: *TNK III*, *Victory Road*, *Guerrilla War* and *Heavy Barrel*.

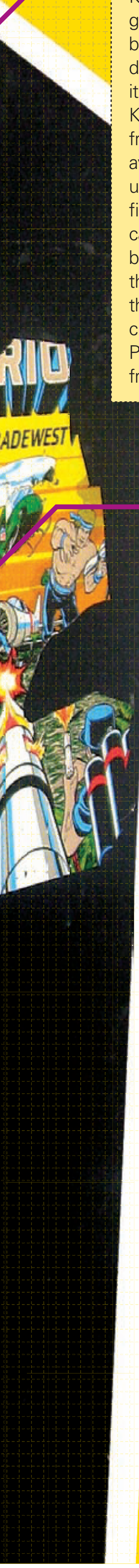
CONTROL PANEL



The control panel itself is in good shape. It is not dented, warped, or Swiss-cheesed. The control panel overlay is in decent condition, though it has a hole worn in it at the front. I have a new overlay for it that I found on eBay about a year ago. I will install it when I restore the machine cosmetically. Regarding the joysticks, which are Seimitsu/SNK LS-30s, one of them was new when I got the machine, while the other has moderate wear.

BOARD

The original wiring harness and card edge connector for *Ikari Warriors* was a bit of a kludge, even when brand new – this was pre-JAMMA days. SNK (Japan) designed and manufactured the board, but Tradewest distributed it in the US. Instead of manufacturing a cabinet for it, Tradewest struck a deal with Dynamo. So Dynamo, rather than creating a custom wiring harness for the SNK pinout, simply used its own 'universal' harness and included a bulky, awkward adaptor for it. The first thing I wanted to do was get rid of the adaptor as it had corroded and lifting pins. I bought a new 44-pin Molex card edge connector, then removed the adaptor and the Dynamo 56-pin 'universal' card edge connector, and installed the new Molex – which is the way it should have been done in the first place.



MONITOR

The machine had a Wells Gardner K4900 in it when I bought it. It had good colour and not much screen burn, but it had a weak tube. I decided to buy a new monitor for it: a Happ Vision Pro. However, the K4900 that was in it had a compact frame, and the Vision Pro was only available with either a standard or a universal mount frame. Neither will fit properly inside a Dynamo HS-1 cabinet when mounted vertically, because the frame extends past the rear opening and you can't get the door on. I swapped the new chassis and tube from the Vision Pro over to the compact K4900 frame and the problem was solved.

SIDE ART

Sections of the original side art are torn away on both sides. I've been looking for new old-stock side art for as long as I've owned the machine, and just the other day I finally found and bought some from a guy that has an online arcade parts store. He's had the side art for a while but had never got around to listing it on his site. I couldn't believe it! I won't be installing it for a while, though, as there is a lot of prep work that I need to do beforehand.

CABINET

Ikari Warriors was the first game to use a Dynamo HS-1 cabinet, which later became very popular for conversions. Dynamo was a generic cabinet manufacturer who made one-size-fits-all cabinets that were usually sold empty to arcade operators. A lot of *Street Fighter II* kits were installed into Dynamo HS-1 cabinets, as they worked well for two-player games because of the extended 'cut corner' control panel, which provided more room for lots of buttons than a typical flush control panel. It also has a monitor mount that can be rotated 90 degrees so it can be used for both vertical and horizontal games.

developer Q&A

We speak to David Shea, the talented coder behind the Amstrad CPC and ZX Spectrum conversions of Ikari Warriors



How did you get into games programming?
Before I got into programming I was into arcade games and used to hang around arcades. Once I got myself a ZX81, I started trying to re-create some of the games I was playing – without much success. However, a little while later I moved on to the Spectrum and things went much better, and I eventually got a version of *Berzerk* running. Around this time I saw an advert from Quicksilva, so I sent my game in. The next thing I knew Quicksilva had agreed to publish it as *Frenzy*.

Tell us about the job of converting *Ikari Warriors* to the Amstrad CPC.
Elite was looking for CPC programmers. I was freelance at the time and went up to Birmingham to see them. I'd never used a CPC before, but figured it couldn't be that hard. Elite gave me *Ikari Warriors* to convert – I'd never heard of the game before! – and I went home and bought a CPC and a book or two and did a crash course on Amstrad programming. Since I'd never worked with Elite before, I was made to go up to its offices and live there for about five weeks. If I remember correctly there was a coin-op there, although most of the graphics and maps were done by an artist via a video tape of the arcade game being played.



What were the most challenging aspects of converting the game to the CPC?
There were several. It had a rotating joystick, so I had to emulate that with a 'lock' key. Second was the amount of graphics being moved around. We went full colour, so although it was a bit slow the graphics looked pretty good. And there was a lot of stuff you could blow up. That's always a challenge.

You later converted the game to the Spectrum. Can you explain how this came about?
Dave Perry was doing the Spectrum version, but Elite wasn't happy with it. I was supposed to be going back to university, but got snowed in so I messed around with the Amstrad code and got it going on the Spectrum – I'd done a lot of cross-porting by that time, and had identical libraries for the Amstrad and Spectrum. I did a quick graphics conversion and sent it to Elite. Next thing I know, my demo was featured on a *Crash* magazine cover tape and I was signed up to finish it off.

Did porting the game to the Spectrum introduce any additional technical problems?
Mainly colour. The Amstrad version was full colour, whereas the Spectrum was limited to colour blocks. The graphics simply didn't look as good. Sound suffered too, but overall I was pretty happy.

How much were you paid for the work?
It was a flat fee. I can't remember exactly how much – probably between £5-10K. I wish it had been royalties!

For *Victory Road* was it simply a case of slotting in new graphics, or did you update the code too?
Ocean called me up about *Victory Road* because I'd done *Ikari Warriors*. Ocean thought it would be the same game with different graphics, but once I took the project on, I discovered it was different. Everything on the ground was destructible, and there were extra bonus rooms and more weapons. I ended up doing a complete re-write, which made it very late, and it received a limited release.

Your conversions were very well received. You must have been chuffed…
Considering that I wrote the CPC version in about six weeks, it was my first CPC game, and the reviews it got, I was really chuffed. What's even better is that, to this day, I've had people contact me and tell me how they enjoyed playing *Ikari Warriors* and how it was their favourite CPC game.

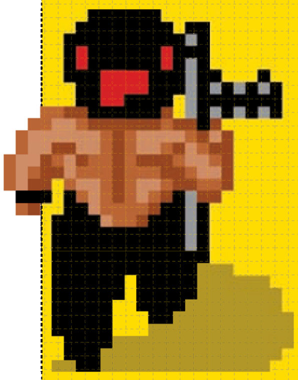
Were you happy converting arcade games, or did you prefer working on original products?
I enjoyed arcade games more than original stuff as there was something to aim for, and often you got a cool cabinet – or in some cases, a briefcase – with the arcade game in it.

A briefcase?
That was something that happened a few years after *Ikari Warriors*. Ocean had these camera cases with joysticks and a JAMMA interface inside for connecting to an arcade board. When doing an arcade conversion Ocean would loan you a case and game board, which you took home, plugged in to your TV, and you had your own arcade game.

What are you up to these days? Did you stay in the games industry?
After *Ikari Warriors* I went to university, although I still wrote games to pay my way. After that I did spells at MicroProse, Mindscape, Probe/Acclaim, then set up Coyote Developments and ran that for about eight years. About four years ago I emigrated to Australia with my family and joined Krome Studios for a few years. Now, I've done a bit of a sideways move. I'm working on gambling machine software, which is kind of games, but a different mindset. After almost 30 years I guess I decided that the games industry was just not exciting me as much as it used to.

COIN-OP CAPERS

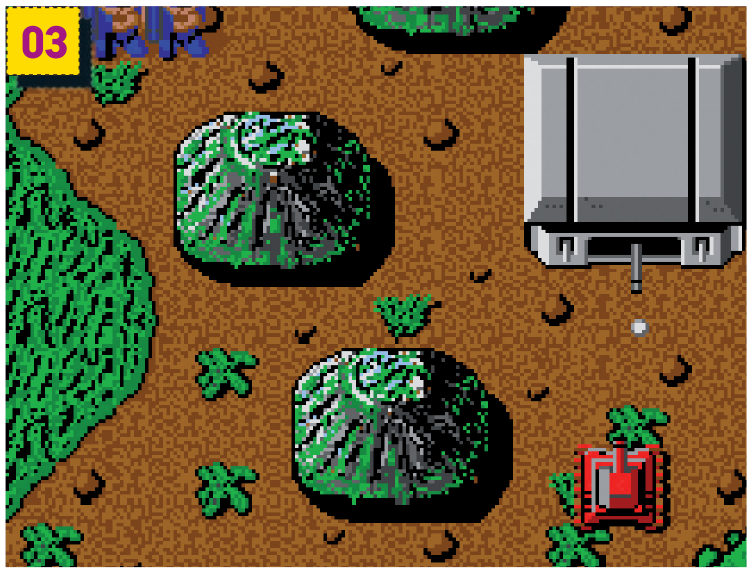
the conversions



There are no truly outstanding ports of Ikari Warriors, but plenty of good ones. Join us to look at the best and worst of what's available







01. Commodore 64 [Best Version]

Ikari Warriors wasn't exactly blessed with stellar conversions, with most of them best described as competent. If you want the definitive version of the game, however, on a home system we'd recommend the C64 version without a second thought. Although it obviously lacks the impressive visuals of its 16-bit cousins, the actual gameplay – at least in John Twiddy's excellent offering – is superb. There are loads of sprites on screen and an excellent soundtrack pumps away in the background, while the controls themselves are as good as you could hope for. Considering the machine that it's running on, this is a mighty fine conversion that just makes our top spot.

02. Amiga

Graphically the Amiga offering of *Ikari Warriors* is the one that most matches its arcade parent. The visuals are nice and authentic, it moves along at a decent pace, and it has solid, meaty effects that really drive home that you're a man on a mission. Controls are also very good, with nice tight handling that's far easier to use than those in the arcade – even if they're not quite as flexible. In fact, this is as close to the original arcade game as you're ever likely to get – excluding what's possible on today's technology – and it's only the sheer slickness of the C64 conversion that made this come in behind it.

03. Atari ST

As is often the case in 16-bit land, there is very little difference between the Atari ST and Amiga offerings of *Ikari Warriors*. Audio is slightly punchier on the Atari ST offering and the sprites and backgrounds look more refined, but it's let down by slightly choppy scrolling. Control-wise it's just as good as the Amiga offering, although it again lacks the versatility that the arcade game offered. Another super-slick conversion of SNK's cult game.

04. Atari 7800

There's a raft of decent arcade conversions on the Atari 7800 and *Ikari Warriors* is no exception. The graphics are of a very high quality, the scrolling is nice and smooth, and there's plenty of action on screen. The sound is rather plinky-plonky, but there's a decent stab at replicating the original arcade controls and the gameplay manages to match the excitement of the original arcade game. It's not without its faults, but this is a fine little conversion that does the 7800 proud.

05. Amstrad

We're going to go out on a limb and say that graphically, the Amstrad CPC version of *Ikari Warriors* is better than all its 8-bit brethren. Until it starts actually moving… Sadly, despite featuring some excellent sprites and beautifully detailed backdrops, the Amstrad's sluggish pace means that a lot of the game's excitement is lost. This in itself is a real pity, as the developer did a great job of capturing the arcade's control system – one button to lock and unlock your character's direction – but the slow pace really kills the game. Pity.

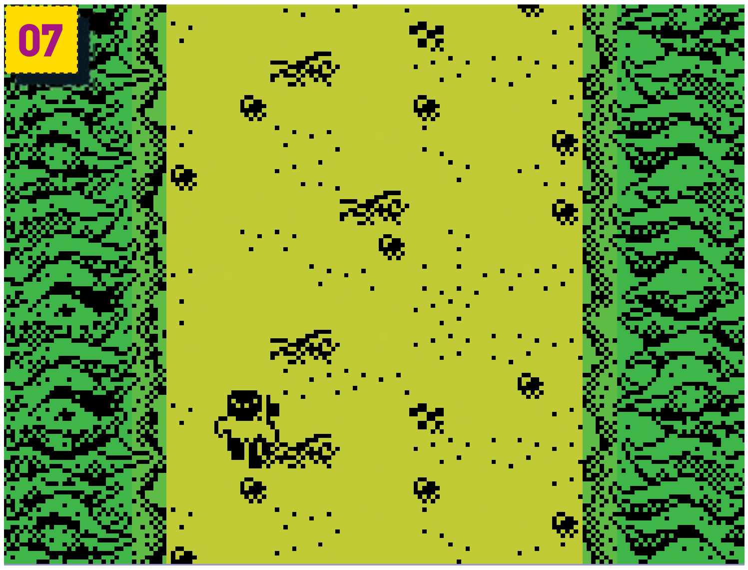
06. Atari 2600

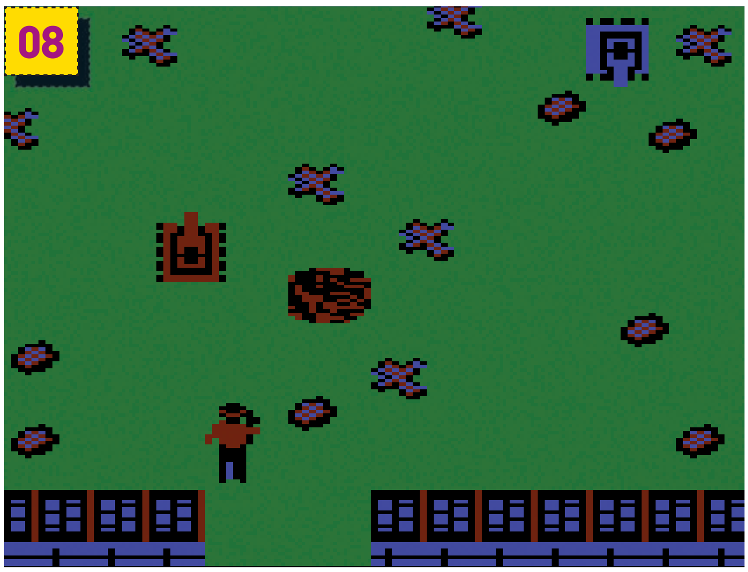
There was always going to be corners cut on the 2600 version of *Ikari Warriors*, but we're still pleasantly surprised with the results. While the lack of a two-player mode is annoying, but fully expected, the graphics are fairly decent, doing a solid job at capturing the spirit of the arcade game.



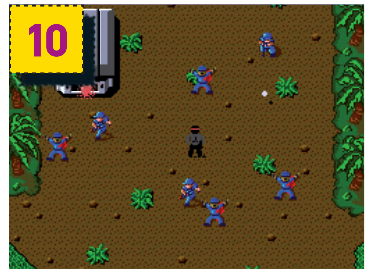
















Sadly the lack of enemies on screen at any one time makes *Ikari Warriors* a relatively simplistic affair, and there's been absolutely no attempt at mimicking the original controls either.

07. ZX Spectrum

We really like the Speccy version of *Ikari Warriors*. The chunky sprites make a decent stab at replicating those of the arcade, and the pace is nice and nippy while the sound – at least on the 128k version – is surprisingly robust. The controls are solid, collision detection is of a high standard, and the whole experience is genuinely enjoyable. Later stages can get cluttered and it can be occasionally hard to spot enemy bullets, but these are small niggles. A respectable, if not earth-shattering, conversion.

08. Commodore 16

As an exercise in nostalgia, or a celebration of technical achievement on low-powered hardware, the C16 edition of *Ikari Warriors* excels. Unfortunately, everything falls apart when it comes to the gameplay experience, which hasn't aged well. And while a two-player mode's been impressively squeezed in, most of the arcade game's map and features are absent.

09. NES

We like the NES offering of *Ikari Warriors*. Sure the soundtrack makes your ears bleed after a while and the constantly flickering sprites are liable to induce a fit, but it remains a genuinely solid conversion of SNK's hit coin-op. Considering that the NES had two buttons, the controls are rather simple – one button fires guns and the other takes care of grenades – especially as they could have replicated the original controls, which they only do with the tank. It's not really an issue, however, and the end result is a solid conversion.

10. MSX2

The MSX2 offering is very similar in feel to the NES conversion, with similar visuals but much less flicker. Scrolling can be a little juddery at times, but it's nice and fast-paced, offers plenty of enemies to mow down, and, as a result, replicates the arcade game very closely. Controls are also solid, while collision detection is pretty much spot-on. Along with the C64 conversion, this is one of the best examples of the arcade hit that's available.

11. PC

There are apparently two versions of *Ikari Warriors* on the PC, but we were only able to find this one. We needn't have bothered, though, as it's a fairly ropey conversion let down by ugly looking sprites and questionable collision detection. It certainly moves along at a nice nippy pace, but it's hampered by some extremely jerky scrolling that, along with the huge number of bullets that appear on screen, makes this far harder than it needs to be.

12. Commodore 64 (US Version)

[Worst Version]

While John Twiddy's excellent Commodore 64 offering sits at the top of our conversions hit list, this miserable effort from Quicksilver Software is absolutely atrocious. The poorly animated sprites blink in and out at random, half the levels are missing, and the sound effects grate horribly on the ears. Collision detection is appalling, the controls are simply horrible, and the whole miserable package is finished off by the complete lack of simultaneous play. Avoid this version like the festering sore on gaming that it is.

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

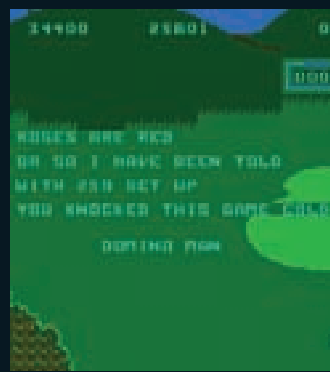


IN DEPTH

» Standing on these dots will automatically lay a domino. The key to earning the big points is to chain them together to make one big line.

» This is the game's hero, who went on to star as the barman in *Tapper* – except now he likes getting drunk on giant dominoes.

» Always be mindful of the whereabouts of enemies, as even if they're not close they could still knock down one of your dominoes.







DOMINO MAN

■ **Developer:** Marvin Glass Associates ■ **Year Released:** 1983 ■ **Genre:** Action

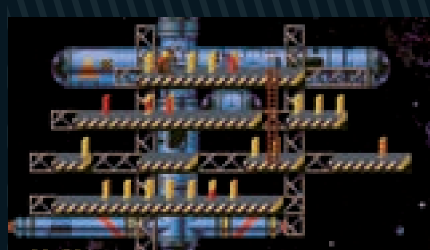
Developed by Marvin Glass Associates, *Domino Man* is considered to be the spiritual predecessor to *Tapper* owing to it featuring the same hero. The whimsical story of *Domino Man* involves helping a moustachioed artist put together giant art installations – basically giant lines of dominoes – around golf courses, busy streets, and parks.

Your aim is to lay a long line of tiles from one end of the screen to the next, and when you've succeeded in your task, the game gives you the option to either topple the line yourself, or gamble it all on completing the next screen – with the idea that you stand to earn far more points if you can make the line longer. Unfortunately, though, the mission is made tricky by the fact that your character appears to be some kind of aggro magnet, and all of the locations he's selected appear to be meeting grounds for blind, domino-despising idiots.

Thankfully, your character is able to drop and pick up the gaming pieces at will, meaning that if he spots an errant pedestrian about to walk right into the path of an erected tile he can quickly remove it to prevent a collision and, if things get really hairy, he can even bat some enemies away with his oversized dominoes. A life is lost in the game if you get hit by an enemy or see all of your dominoes end up horizontal prematurely at the hands of an annoying perambulator. Removing and replacing dominoes, whether you need to or not, is also a good way to boost your score, which actually brings us rather nicely to another good aspect about *Domino Man*: it's quite the addictive little score-attack game and is certainly worth investigating if you're looking for something new.

While *Domino Man* isn't the most colourful-looking arcade game, its brownish Charles M Schulz-style visuals, similar in style to *Tapper* and *Paperboy*, give it a genuine sense of personality. And this is helped too with plenty of surrealist humour, such as an irritating wasp that chases you round the screen, poems displayed on the game over screen that comment on how well you did in the game, and weird cut-scenes that show you beating down a bully using a giant domino.

The reasons why *Tapper* found a number of home releases but *Domino Man* didn't remain a bit of a mystery to us. In our opinion it's the better and more sophisticated of the two games. We can only guess that the reason is because it just wasn't as commercial successful as *Tapper* and thus home conversions of the game were never considered.



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

PUSH-OVER 1992

Push-Over, by Red Rat and Ocean, saw players help a red soldier ant to position different types of dominoes in such a way so as to knock them all down in a single push. The game was a tie-in with Quavers crisps and was released on various platforms, including the Amiga, Atari ST and Super Nintendo.

GAIA CRUSADERS

■ **Developer:** Noise Factory ■ **Year Released:** 1999 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **Unconverted side-scrolling beat-'em-ups are a hundred a penny, but there are some real gems if you're prepared to dig around some generic-sounding titles long enough.** One such example is this fighter by Noise Factory, a development outfit of SNK that is most notable for the *Power Instinct* games. The game is a nice-looking fighter that boasts a fulsome roster of fighters, moves and enemies – including some impressive boss fights – and proves an enjoyable way to kill half an hour. The game also features a satisfying combat system that allows you to effortlessly string together punches and kicks, and there are loads of *Golden Axe*-style spell attacks too, obtained by collecting little orbs dropped by fallen enemies. Oh, and the music is pretty decent too. *Gaia Crusaders* might surprise you – it's a nicely presented brawler with a surprising number of layers, and if you find yourself really liking the game there's an equally decent clone of the game called *Thunder Heroes*, which features different stages, enemies, and a few different playable characters and bosses – basically just more of the same.



» [Arcade] *Gaia Crusaders* is a really nice-looking scrolling fighter from Noise Factory.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

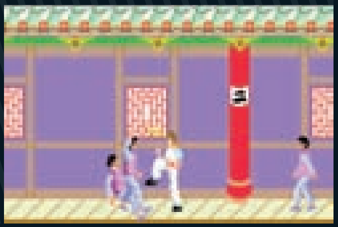
CAPTAIN COMMANDO 1991



While *Gaia Crusaders* certainly draws influence from *Golden Axe*, the overall style of the gameplay reminds us of Capcom's *Captain Commando* much more. That game was released on the Super Nintendo and PlayStation, as well as numerous compilations.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

KUNG-FU MASTER 1984



Easy, really. It can only be Irem's seminal side-scrolling brawler – the game that started it all. Clearly a big inspiration for *Kuri Kinton*, *Kung-Fu Master* was also released on almost every format known to man back in the day, so it's easy to pick up.

KURI KINTON

■ **Developer:** Taito ■ **Year Released:** 1987 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up

■ **Those of you in ownership of *Taito Legends 2* may have heard of *Kuri Kinton*, which, according to Google, is the name of a Chinese mashed potato dish, which makes absolutely no sense in the context of a look at this fighting game from Taito.** Anyway, the game basically feels like Irem's *Kung-Fu Master* spliced with *Dragon Ball Z* – not that we watch it. The story finds a Chinese cop battling through waves of soldiers, kick boxers, and Boba Fett and Bruce Lee lookalikes in order to rescue a high-ranking police officer and his daughter after they've been kidnapped and imprisoned inside an underground lair by a gang.

As in *Kung-Fu Master*, the player must battle from one end of the screen to the opposite, punching, kicking, sweep kicking and flying kicking the crap out of all and sundry. While the levels are fairly bland and the bosses are all pretty much the same sprite but in different-coloured underpants, there's just something quite fun about the game that makes it very difficult to put down – what that is, though, we're still not exactly sure, because it doesn't do anything to really excel in any area. Hopefully it'll come to you.



» [Arcade] When two dragons are facing off, the exciting part is clearly the two men in primary-coloured robes.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

KAMIKAZE CABBIE

■ **Developer:** Data East ■ **Year Released:** 1984 ■ **Genre:** Driving

■ **With a similar premise and title, this early arcade game by Data East basically plays like a precursor to Sega's *Crazy Taxi*.** Steering a little yellow cab around the city, your mission is to ferry people to hospitals, churches and other destinations to earn fares. The main difference is that this opts for a top-down perspective, and players have to be mindful of a depleting fuel gauge, frequently making pit stops to garages to keep gas in the tank. Now you'd think with a novel premise and its *Crazy Taxi* similarities the game would be pretty good, right? Sadly, this isn't the case. The game is spoilt by fiddly controls, pretty poor track design as you're essentially just driving round a colourful maze, a lack of customers, and a barmy way to guide you to your destination. You're given basic X and Y-style map co-ordinates that update in real-time your position in relation to the target, meaning you have to frequently pull your attention away from the road to keep on top of your location.



DESERT • ISLAND • DISKS

Larry DeMar

What cherished games would you take to the island?

Coding wizard Larry DeMar has had his hand in some of the finest coin-ops and pinball machines ever made. Paul Drury hears about shoot-'em-ups and silver balls

Yes, there is a paradise at the end," Larry DeMar assures us, taking another gulp of local ale. "You fly through pirouetting ballerinas. And you get a million points!"

This isn't Larry's vision of the afterlife, nor is it the beer talking. He's telling us about the conclusion to *Blaster*, his final videogame project for Williams. We're sitting in a bar in Earl's Court, where he's been showcasing his company's latest gaming project, The Wheel of Fortune Experience, at London's annual International Gaming Expo. The mammoth slot machine certainly turned heads, but we're here to talk about his part in creating some truly heavenly arcade games back in the Eighties. *Defender* and *Robotron* remain in most sane gamers' top ten coin-ops, and as a pinball programmer, he worked on the critically lauded Twilight Zone and The Addams Family, the biggest-selling table of all time. Indeed, growing up in Oak Park, Illinois in the Sixties, with Alvin Gottlieb of the famous pinball and videogame company living a block away, we imagine he must have spent much of his youth in the arcades of the Windy City.

"I wish!" laughs Larry. "Pinball was illegal in our part of Chicago. I could only play it in private homes or when travelling. Luckily, my buddy across the street had a machine in his basement. I was fascinated by pinball. I couldn't play it enough."

Young Larry was also fascinated with the emerging world of computers, and by 1970, the 7th grader was catching the train downtown on Saturdays to take a special computer class for high school pupils at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Thus it was perhaps unsurprising that he ended up an undergraduate at MIT in Cambridge, Massachusetts, America's pre-eminent university for science and technology.

"I majored in Computer Science and minored in pinball machines," winks Larry. "After growing up without access to pinball machines, now there were 20-something on campus. There were two in the basement of my dorm and when we weren't playing them, we were trying to take them apart or hack them. Trying to find ways of not paying for pinball became a way of life!"

This combination of technical trickery and practical hacking meant Larry had no problem landing a summer job in Chicago repairing pinball machines. Back at MIT, his inside knowledge meant he started to look at them with a more critical eye. One night, while playing Eight Ball, he got increasingly irritated, not with Fonzie's unorthodox cuing action on the back-glass, but with two score-sapping bugs.

"I got really annoyed with whoever had programmed it," he recalls. "When you completed the second rack of balls it stole the super bonus from you, and if you wrap the score, you don't get your extra credits. I was ranting and raving and maybe I'd had a few too many diet cokes that night. One of my friends said, 'Well, could you do any better?'"

Suitably inspired, Larry wrote to Bally, Gottlieb and Williams the next day and the latter called him in for interview. On completion of his senior year, they offered him a job but Larry followed his head not his heart and took a better paid post with more obvious prospects at Bell Labs. However, he soon became frustrated working on 20-year-old technology and decided to call Ken Fedesna at Williams, hoping Ken might be able to get him into the AMOA show in Chicago, where everything was shiny and new.

"I saw *Galaxian* for the first time and Gorgar at the Williams booth," enthuses Larry, still grateful for the guest pass. "I had this wonderful experience and just wanted to be part of this industry. I asked Ken if they had any opportunities and he told me they were just getting into videogames and were hiring. The project starts next week!"

That project was to evolve into *Defender*, Williams' first foray into this brave new world since it had dabbled with *Pong* clone *Paddle Ball* in 1973. January 1980 was an interesting time to join the company; it was a stalwart of the pinball industry since the 1940s, and, in Larry's estimation, no longer

Trivia

After *Robotron* was released, Larry and Eugene were involved in a short-lived project to produce colour vector games for Williams. The space-based game was sadly abandoned due to hardware problems.

Black Knight was an early collaboration with legendary pinball designer Steve Ritchie





> “I saw Galaxian and Gorgar and just wanted to be part of this industry!”

Larry gets career advice at 1979’s AMOA show

FAMOUS FOR
Robotron and The Addams Family pinball

FIRST JOB
Dog walker

CURRENT JOB
Director, LED gaming

FAVOURITE FILM
Grease

FAVOURITE ALBUM
Goodbye Yellow Brick Road

FAVOURITE BOOK
Ender’s Game by Orson Scott Card

BESTSELLING PRODUCT
Defender

BEST HOLIDAY
Maui

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
My kids

145235-4674654654654 6

DESERT ISLAND

SEX
M

NAME
Larry DeMar

DATE OF BIRTH
18 FEB 1957

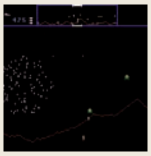
PLACE OF BIRTH
Chicago

BIOGRAPHY
Initially joining Williams’ pinball division, Larry soon teamed up with Eugene Jarvis to create Defender, Stargate and Robotron. He returned to pinball in the mid-Eighties and worked on such tables as High Speed and The Addams Family.

Timeline

1980 | 1981 | 1982 | 1983

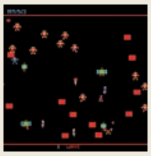
DEFENDER
■ **YEAR:** 1980
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
Larry's first involvement with videogame creation was Williams' scrolling shooter, though he had no involvement with the pinball table.



STARGATE
■ **YEAR:** 1981
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
Larry and Eugene's first game as independent developers, this sequel to *Defender* was full of clever ideas and showboating opportunities.



ROBOTRON:2084
■ **YEAR:** 1982
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
The best arcade game ever made? You'll find plenty that say so, including the editor of the magazine you're holding and many of our castaways.

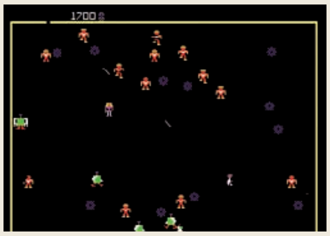


BLASTER
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
'Does Paradise exist?' asks its attract screen, but despite some imaginative foes to blast, this doesn't ascend to arcade heaven.



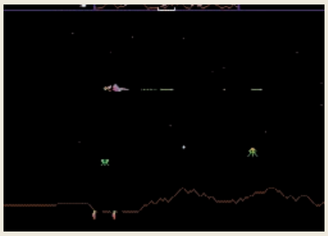
The Team On DeMar

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Larry's games…





Darran Jones
Larry DeMar, along with Eugene Jarvis, has been behind some of my favourite arcade games, including *Defender* and the mighty *Robotron: 2084*. Needless to say, I'm in awe of what he could create with such limited resources. Now, excuse me, I'm off to play *Robotron* again.





Paul Drury
To have been involved in such seminal titles as *Defender* and *Robotron* would be enough to secure a place in arcade's Hall of Fame, but to have also helped to create some of the best pinball tables ever made is a unique achievement. And if you like your slots, he's on the money too.

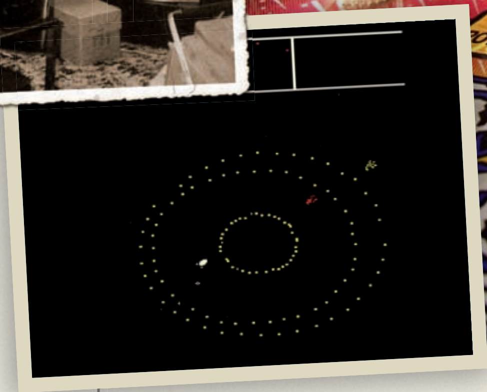




Stuart Hunt
Larry's is certainly an impressive career. Helping create not one but two iconic and defining arcade classics, before going on to program some of the most successful pinball tables ever made, his skill and contribution can be felt in all areas of the coin-op industry – it's a truly unique tale.







» An exclusive screen from *Conquest*, an aborted project Larry began between *Stargate* and *Robotron*.

at the cutting edge. "They were quite conservative; way behind Bally," he says. "Then Steve [Ritchie] and Eugene [Jarvis] arrived and really shook things up. A lot of people didn't like it and didn't want to change. Steve was this rough guy and Eugene was this geeky weird guy. Why would I want to work with them? They saw me as someone that could be on their team and when we started socialising, I realised, 'These are the guys that are making things happen!' If I hadn't got in with those two guys at the beginning, I don't know what story it would've been. It's the luckiest thing that ever happened to me."

Larry was a willing collaborator with these two masters of their respective arts. For Steve, he was working on the speech and software systems for Black Knight and Scorpion, while attending *Defender* planning meetings with Eugene and sharing some of the multitasking breakthroughs he was making on pinball development with Williams' videogame venture. "We were working in a media that was new to us, just trying to get things moving on screen. Ray Gay, one of the team, who is deaf, was a talented artist and a great game player and he started drawing more interesting characters. We made this demo called Circus with this guy jumping about on a springboard, riding a skateboard, a clown walking about… with our multitasking software we got this all working independently. That was the base that Eugene built *Defender* on."

> "We cranked up the robot count till it got to 100 and was just beyond crazy"
>
> *Larry plays the Robotron numbers game*

As the project progressed, Eugene took his team to an off-site facility located on Belden Avenue, where they worked feverishly to complete the game in time for its scheduled AMOA show debut. "That last week was ridiculous," recalls Larry. "With days to go before the show, there was just the roughest part of the game running. The scariest thing was that our development tools were so crude and inefficient that to go round the loop of making a change, saving it in the editor, running it through the assembler, loading it into the game and testing it took so long that for many days, Eugene left the game loaded in the emulator and was patching it into memory. If there'd been a power cut, *Defender* would have never made it to the show. We were on the edge!"

Larry played his part, working through the night to put in an attract mode and then burning the EPROMS at 6am on the morning of the show – twice, as after the first attempt, the chips didn't work, causing veins to bulge and expletives to fill the air like a swarm of angry mutants. Against all the odds, *Defender* made it to the ball, though initially she was met with indifference by arcade operators who dismissed her as too complicated. Once players got their hands on that button-strewn control panel, though, they embraced the challenge and the game became a huge hit, selling over 50,000 units and triumphantly announcing Williams' arrival as a major force in videogames.

Larry and his mom save the humans on this Robotron cocktail cabinet at Chicago's AMOA show in 1982

1983

SPACE SHUTTLE
■ **YEAR:** 1983
■ **VERSION:** Pinball
Larry was lured back into pinball programming by Joe Kaminkow who had secured the licence from NASA for this stylish table.



1986

HIGH SPEED
■ **YEAR:** 1986
■ **VERSION:** Pinball
Steve Ritchie themed this on a police chase he had while driving far too fast. He credits Larry with part of the design as well as programming.



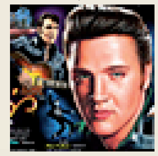
1992

ADDAMS FAMILY
■ **YEAR:** 1992
■ **VERSION:** Pinball
The most successful flipper table of all time. One thousand Special Edition 'Gold' machines were produced to mark the achievement.



2006

ELVIS MULTI-STRIKE VIDEO SLOT
■ **YEAR:** 2006
■ **VERSION:** Arcade
The King of slots? This is one of many successful products produced by LED Gaming over the last decade.





» Twilight Zone: rated best table by those wizards at **ipdb.org**.

For Larry and Eugene, the success of the game was a mixed blessing. Dissatisfied with their share of the colossal profits generated by *Defender* and an influx of new employees, the pair decided to set up as independent videogame creators, Vid Kidz. "Williams hired lots of people to make games and the enjoyment just went out of the company," says Larry. "We'd been small and dedicated and now the place was overcrowded and just really hot. Management tried to talk us out of leaving but when it was clear that wasn't happening, they said 'Well, make games for us!' *Defender* is wrapping up and we need a game in three months. My answer was that the only game we can give you in three months is the sequel to *Defender*. We can't possibly start from scratch!"

And so the *Stargate* project was born. Williams kindly loaned the fledgling developers one of their $30,000 Motorola Exorciser systems, which was installed in the spare bedroom of Larry's condo in downtown Chicago. The pair became 24-hour programming people, with Eugene taking the day shift and Larry coding through the night, to deliver a game that could challenge experienced *Defender* players, who could skilfully skip levels via the warp gates, while not alienating a new audience.

Their finest balancing act was yet to come, though. *Robotron*'s innovative dual-joystick control system actually began as a prototype that utilised a pair of old Atari VCS sticks to give the player unprecedented freedom of fire. "It was so intuitive, it was amazing," enthuses Larry. "When we were programming it, Eugene started by putting in, like, ten robots and kept increasing it. It got wilder and wilder as we put in more guys. By 30 or 40 robots we kind of maxed it out; it was just mayhem. We proved it was fun so the next stage was to get some real joysticks to replace the Atari ones. We put in some Wico Leaf Switch joysticks, and suddenly it was too easy! The accuracy of those sticks was so much better. We went back and cranked up the robot count till it got to about 100 and was just beyond crazy. In game design, the accuracy of the controls is a real factor. You need to get the balance right."

Vid Kidz undoubtedly hit the sweet spot and *Robotron* remains a sublime shooter. Their next project, *Blaster*, was a sequel of sorts, taking the *Robotron* story and sending it into space and the third dimension. "Atari announced [it was] coming out with the 5200 and we'd got word it would more or less be an Atari 800 wrapped up in a box without a keyboard," explains Larry. "So we thought we'd develop a game for the 800 and we'd be all ready for when the new system came out. We showed the completed home version to Mike Stroll at Williams and he loved it. He asked for a coin-op version and for us to hold off the home version until that came out."

The pair dutifully developed a fully fledged arcade game, an ambitious 20-level flight of fancy, featuring such delights as Time Tunnels and a trip through Cat World. Released in 1983, with a limited run produced in striking Duramold cabinets, the game found itself caught in some unfortunate crossfire. "The timing was terrible; the industry was crashing, plus it just wasn't our best game," acknowledges Larry. "*Robotron* is still huge fun. *Blaster* is a little fun to play."

Lost in space

After Vid Kidz had delivered *Defender* sequel *Stargate* to Williams, Larry and Eugene each started their own original projects. "Mine was called *Conquest*," remembers Larry. "I didn't get very far as *Robotron* got so interesting, so I quickly jumped off *Conquest* to join Eugene on that. You were a ship roughly in the centre of a screen of a 2D scrolling universe. It played with controls like *Omega Race*; you had a wheel for your rotation and then thrust and fire. It was quite elegant. I had created a scanner, the player's fireball shots and a program that generated these circular explosions that we later used to create the Time Tunnel in *Blaster*. Then we heard *Sinistar* was in development, so we put it to one side and never finished it. If we'd concentrated on it, we probably would've beaten *Sinistar* to market by a year." Larry kept the source code and **Retro Gamer** is proud to show you an exclusive screenshot of this intriguing title on the opposite page.





DeMar on DeMar

Larry picks his three favourite projects from his long career



■ **DEFENDER**
What these three projects have in common is that they were all really important, all beyond the core competencies of the people involved and there wasn't enough time to complete them! *Defender* was a miraculous effort by an incredibly hard-working, collaborative team.



■ **PINBALL 2000**
We needed this to succeed to survive – it didn't and we didn't! We were in over our heads, trying to marry this video system with a pinball machine. We designed all the hardware, every mechanical element, all the software and delivered it in less time than Midway would take to do a game.



■ **WHEEL OF FORTUNE EXPERIENCE**
A big, ambitious slot that links five players and runs on a 103-inch plasma display. It was a collaboration of our whole group, delivered in an impossible timeframe. It only got done because an incredible group of people put the project ahead of themselves.

Stargate sailing on Larry's boat in the Eighties, sporting a specially made spinnaker





Readers' Questions

Mayhem: In your working partnership, what did Eugene feel you brought to the table and what did you feel Eugene brought to the table?
Eugene is the creative genius of the team and I think I added a lot in terms of gameplay and balance and features. He was steering the ship with the big ideas, though!

Scapegoat: Why do you feel pinball died off the way it did, even when works of genius like The Addams Family were still around?
I think it went down the wrong path and got itself to a point that it couldn't satisfy both good players and casual players. Getting rid of some of the randomness, so that every ramp shot got returned to a flipper lane and every time you make a good shot, it stays in your control. Then if you do lose control, you have all these ball saves and bozo balls that kept giving you another chance. It made it so good players could play for too long and that was compounded by the rules getting so complicated that it left the casual players clueless. That was happening while I was still in pinball and a lot of people were trying to get it back on the right path. Jack*bot, a remake of Pinbot, was our attempt to put some randomness back and make the rules simpler.

KW: Of all the pinball games that have ever been created for computer and videogame consoles, which do you feel comes closest to simulating the real thing?
I haven't played many recent ones but I thought *Pro Pinball: The Web* was as good as I had ever seen.

NonShinyGoose: Is there a film licence you wish you'd been given to base a pinball machine on?
Good question! I wouldn't mind doing a *Grease* pinball!

NorthWay: Does having been a 'name' in the industry in the Stone Age have any weight behind it in the games industry today?
I'd say a little. I don't think having a reputation of having done something in the past carries directly, but it may make a difference as to how seriously people take you. They run my name through Google and see my pinball and videogame work and I think that helps when I'm trying to get a new business relationship going.

It's an entertaining curio – you can find *Blaster* on *Midway Arcade Treasures* and Larry helped get the unreleased home version into the public domain back in 2004 – but its critical and commercial failure was to signal the end of Vid Kidz. Eugene moved back to California to study for his Masters degree and Larry returned to his first love: pinball. Over the next 15 years, he worked on an array of excellent tables, teaming up with Steve Ritchie once more for High Speed and Pat Lawlor for Banzai Run, Funhouse (which features the voice of Ed '*Mortal Kombat*' Boon), the bestselling Addams Family and fan favourite Twilight Zone. Forgive our ignorance, Larry, but what exactly does a pinball programmer do?

"In some ways it's more challenging than videogames; in other ways, less so, but you do the same kind of things," he explains. "You use programming to bring the designer's vision to life. Part of that is creating lots of rules for the game. With pinball, you team up with a designer and it varies how much creative input the programmer has. Sometimes the designer dictates what he wants and the programmer makes it happen. Other times, the designer gives you a rough framework and you basically create the whole game. The best is when both of them are doing a lot of everything."

The team certainly triumphed with The Addams Family. Released in 1992 and boasting a range of clever touches – we always loved the way the flippers clicked along to the theme tune – it went on to sell over 20,000 units, making it the biggest-selling flipper table of all time. "To be honest, for the first half of the project, the game wasn't a lot of fun," chuckles Larry. "We took a prototype to the movie premiere in Los Angeles and we had some interesting discussions that night because we were playing it and it was terrible! We had real problems balancing how often the different features happened, particularly when and how Thing would appear. Trying to have the right amount of risk and reward and having the game move you on to new features or areas of the table and not having any one of them too heavily weighted… the key to a great pinball game is balance."

> "For the first half of The Addams Family project, the game was terrible!"
>
> It came good in the second half, though

Trivia

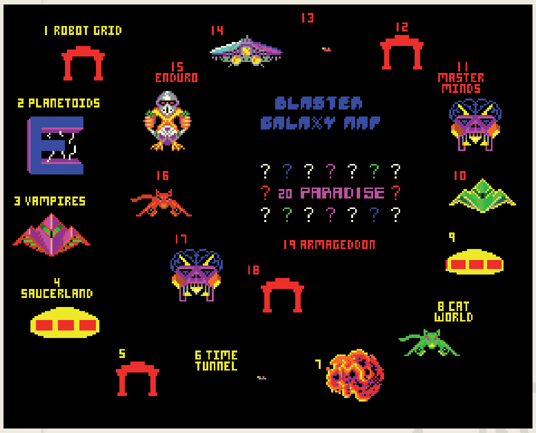
TILT: *The Battle To Save Pinball* chronicles Williams' last gasp effort to reinvigorate the industry with the Pinball 2000 project. Larry describes it as "A story of heroes, success and failure, all wrapped up in an amazing tale." See www.tilt-movie.com

Larry's magic touch led to a promotion to head of engineering in the mid-Nineties and he was involved in Williams' pinball output until it sadly closed its doors at the end of the decade after the failure of the Pinball 2000 project. Towards the end of his time there, the company had looked to enter the slot machine market, so Larry built on the experience and together with former Williams' colleagues Scott Slomiany, Duncan Brown and his brother Steven, founded Leading Edge Design to "create slots people would actually want to play". Over the last ten years, LED Gaming has produced a wealth of slot machines and video poker titles, including a recent collaboration with Raw Thrills on Multi-Strike Super Times Pay Poker. Hang on, isn't that Eugene Jarvis's setup?

"Yeah, we worked together on that one," smiles Larry. "Eugene and I are still friends. We're going to the Cubs game when I get back!"

All together now: If the Kidz are united…

Thanks to Aeneas at **www.flippers.be** and Kerry for the pinball photos.



» Paradise is a mere 20 million light years away in *Blaster*

Larry DeMar's

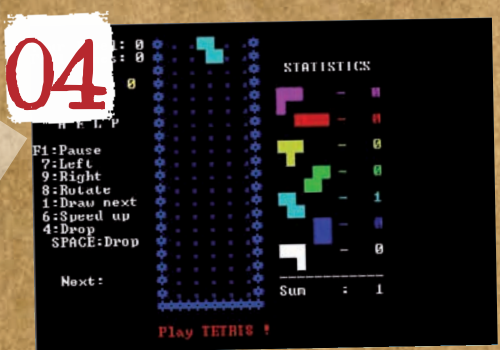
Desert Island Disks

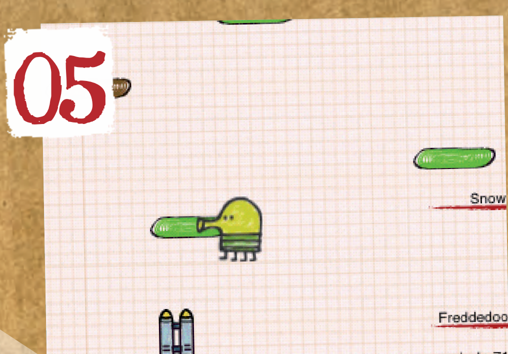
The games that Larry DeMar just couldn't live without and why he loves them

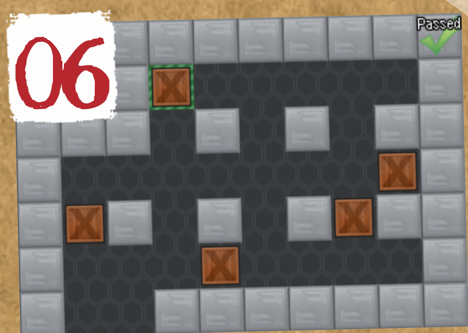
















01 Attack from Mars PINBALL

This game just kicks my butt! A masterpiece by Brian Eddy and Lyman Sheats, the designer and programmer. I talk about balance in pinball and Lyman is brilliant at getting it right. It's an adrenaline rush when you get into an intense game. A real battle.

02 Addams Family PINBALL

It doesn't get old or tired! One of the reasons it was so successful was it had great balance and a lot of features. With some of the better pinballs, you can have two bad games for every one great one. It had enough randomness to it. A lot of machines were losing that in the later days and it hurt pinball.

03 Robotron ARCADE

The sheer amount of strategy and tactics hasn't been matched in many games over the years. The rush of the frenetic gameplay, the mayhem… I don't know if it's the best ever, but I know it's lasted – I still play it and if I'm stuck on that island for a long time, I hope it'll take me down for a while.

04 Tetris PC

We had the PC version when it came out and I think the whole productivity of Williams went down for six months! Everyone was playing *Tetris* instead of working, including myself. It's straightforward and totally mesmerising. It's amazing how good you can get at it and it still plays well. You always want to do better.

05 DoodleJump IPHONE

Do any of your castaways pick iPhone games? No? Well, this is a brilliant, brilliant game. The simplest of games but you just can't stop playing it.

06 Boxed In IPHONE

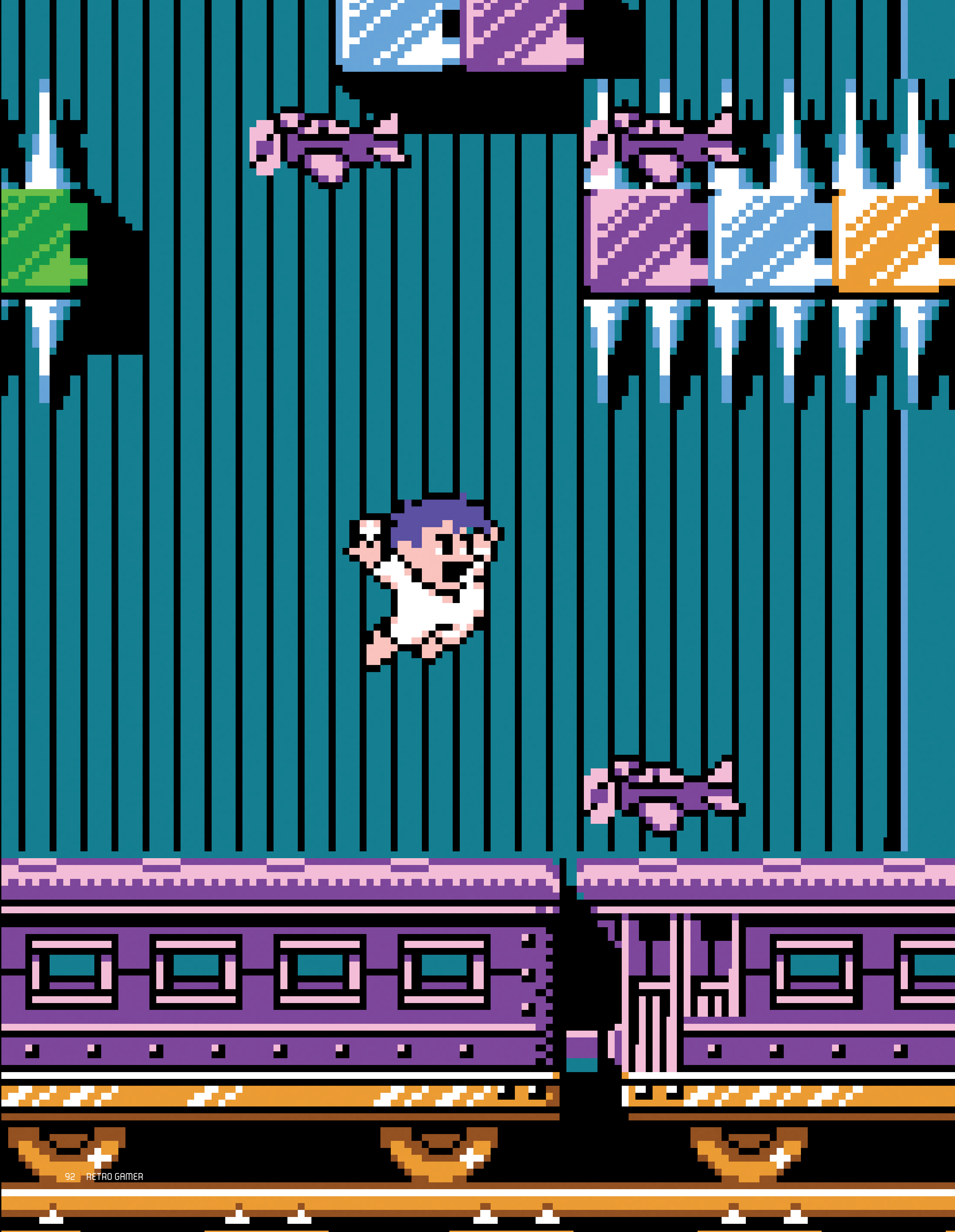
I'll take this with the caveat that I can have several hundred puzzles to go with it. If you remember *Chips Challenge*, it's that type of game with a little puzzle to work out. Amazing, elaborate, ingenious puzzles that I never get tired of when I have a spare moment.

07 Scribblenauts DS

For no other reason than it's brilliant. Accommodating all the inventory list and then bringing those things to life so you can interact with them in an interesting way – that makes the gameplay. Simply brilliant!

08 Mario Kart Wii

I don't play it that much but I watch my kids play it all the time and I'm in awe of the amount of content they are able to put into this type of game. Staggering. If I'm on a desert island I'd play it a lot more and get really good!





Little Nemo: The Dream Master

DON'T LET THE BED BUGS BITE…

» RETROREVIVAL



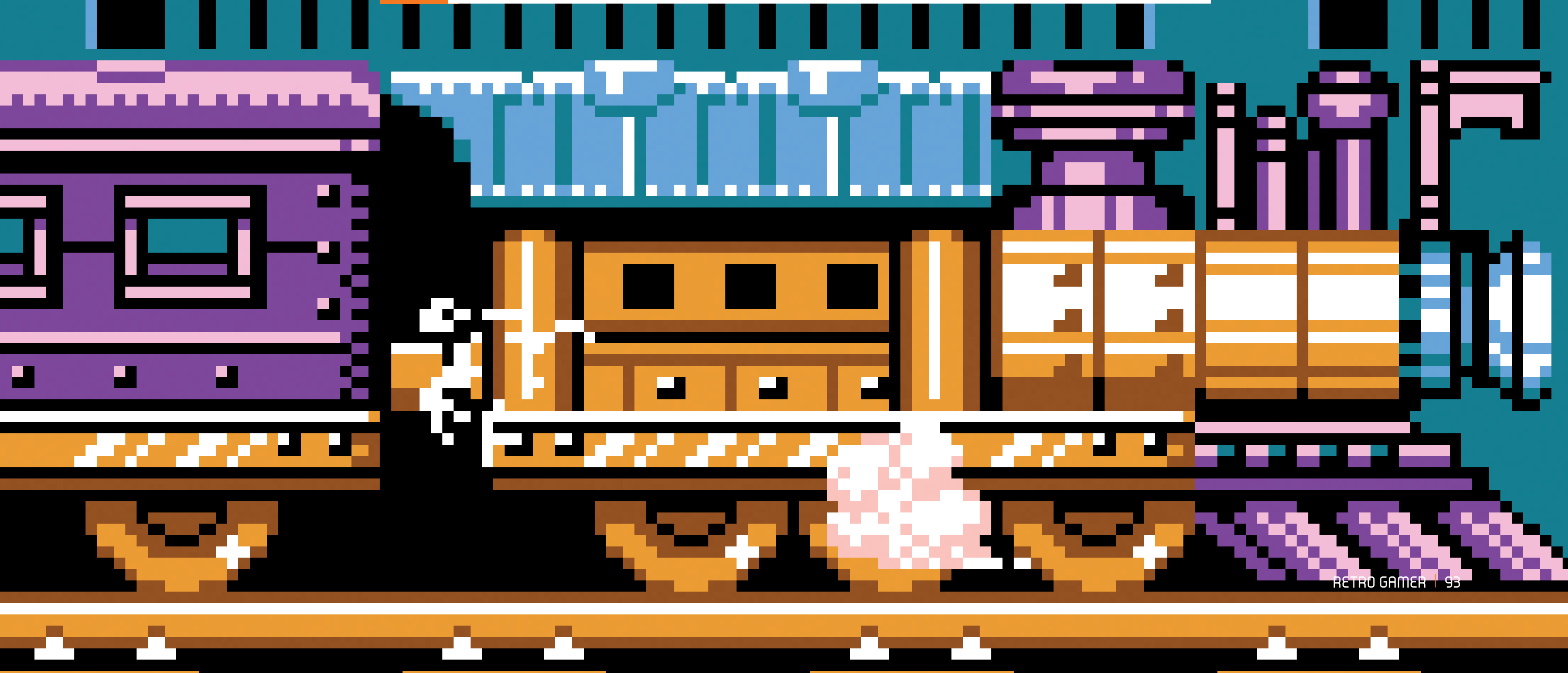
» NES
» CAPCOM
» 1990

With Christopher Nolan's latest movie *Inception* – a movie about sharp-suited thieves indulging in dream invasion to extract important information, like missile codes and what has caused Mel Gibson to have another meltdown – currently leaving filmgoers scratching their heads, I'm blessed with a tenuous link to write about a classic NES game that also tried to blur the line between the dream and real world.

Loosely based on a famous newspaper comic series by Winsor McCay, a boy named Nemo awakes in the night and is met by a woman dressed like a clown and learns that a bored princess from a far-off land is looking for a playmate and Nemo has caught her eye. He buys the story and promptly gets whisked to Slumberland – an overtly hostile place where cute, cuddly looking animals are more likely to be visitor-hating killing machines. However, rather than get dropped off at the door of the palace so that he and the Princess can go for a nice picnic in Lollipop Forest – based on what we've seen by this point, we dread to think what horrors await in there – he gets inconveniently plonked a few worlds away, where said cute killers and several frustrating bosses are standing between him and his date.

Thankfully, Nemo has been armed with an infinite supply of candy that has been laced with some kind of hypnotic drug. Lobbing the confectionary at the less aggressive animals in the land, though still deadly, will see them guzzle them up and eventually drift off to sleep. In this state, Nemo can then jump into their skin and make use of their powers, and this weird practice plays an important part in the game. The main aim of each stage is to collect a set number of keys to unlock the door that leads to its exit, and players must use these animals' powers to collect keys that are inaccessible to Nemo in his regular boy state.

Little Nemo: The Dream Master is a wonderful-looking platformer with some great ideas, great graphics and intricate level design. It may be a bit of a nightmare to finish, but it's still a great game that no NES collection should be without. *



RETRORATED



>> It's another strong showing for digital releases this month. Hydro Thunder makes a welcome reappearance and Gameloft reinvents the Metroidvania genre on DSiWare, while Crystal Dynamics delivers the best Lara Croft game we've ever played

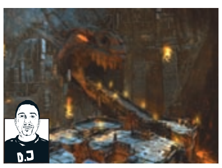
>> DRAGON QUEST IX: SENTINELS OF THE STARRY SKIES

DS

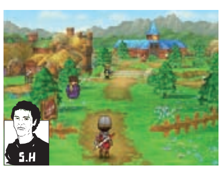


SIMPLY HEAVENLY

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light
Lots to unlock means that I'm going to be playing this forever.



STUART
Dragon Quest IX
Now that Darran's finally joined me in multiplayer, lunchtimes will never be the same again.



DAVID
Monkey Island 2: SE
I've always loved these games and it's brilliant to see this superb makeover for the sequel.

INFORMATION

- **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DS
- **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £34.99
- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **DEVELOPER:** SQUARE ENIX
- **PLAYERS:** 1-4

BRIEF HISTORY

» Debuting on the Famicom in 1986 and spanning a series of nine games and a number of spin-offs, the *Dragon Quest* series – originally dubbed *Dragon Warrior* in the US – was the brainchild of designer Yuji Horii and his development team Armor Project. The game is very popular in Japan and is renowned for its simple, no-frills approach to role-playing.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SECRET OF MANA (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW
3D DOT GAME HEROES (PS3)

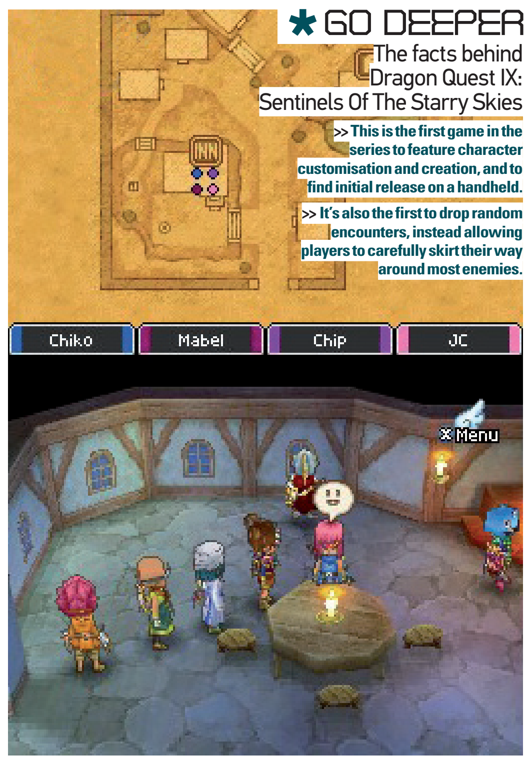


Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels Of The Starry Skies



Since the first game's release some 20 years ago, the *Dragon Quest* series has become one of Japan's oldest and most popular role-playing game franchises. Coming from Square Enix, it has always been the studio's most accessible and Western-feeling RPG series, and has slowly distanced itself from the *Final Fantasy* series by not always looking to reinvent itself. So, if the normally elitist-feeling sub-genre is something you've been pondering dipping a toe into lately, then this latest episode is something we can recommend to you without worry. It's an accessible adventure that fans of classic top-down SNES RPGs will feel instantly at home in, and while it does nothing particularly flashy or new – it plays things pretty close to the *Dragon Quest* template but adds a few new elements never before seen in the franchise – it's that familiarity that gives it its charm.

Dragon Quest IX also shows what joyous things can happen when you get the stars to align. The figurative constellation is made up of a developer collaboration between



✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels Of The Starry Skies

>> This is the first game in the series to feature character customisation and creation, and to find initial release on a handheld.

>> It's also the first to drop random encounters, instead allowing players to carefully skirt their way around most enemies.

» [DS] The turn-based battle mechanic is simple to grasp, and random encounters have also been dropped. Hurrah!





» [DS] Customisation doesn't just affect how your player looks. What you're wearing can have an effect on certain enemies too.

Square and Level-5 (*Rogue Galaxy*, *Professor Layton*), some entertaining storytelling by the series' creator Yuji Horii, and sterling work by Square's Enix's best localisation team to help us understand the game's engaging and witty narrative.

The basic story focuses on an angel who has lost their wings due to a *Shenmue*-style magic tree going loopy. Left to try to find your way back to the heavens, you must get to the bottom of the story and get your ticket home by basically doing good deeds for people – both alive and dead – in the real world.

The structure and way this story plays out is relatively simple to follow: you enter a village, get to know the locals, find out who is in need of your help, and then go out and be a do-gooder. This often involves you – or you and your NPC party – venturing out into the outskirts of the village and/or taking a trip into a dungeon or two where the game's many odd-looking monsters await, and then engaging them in turn-based fisticuffs, levelling up as you go. The way your characters level up also brings us to another good aspect about *DQ IX*: levelling up seems to sync quite naturally with progression, so that it almost feels automatic, and thus it becomes something to keep track of but never stress out about. But yet there's also a bit of depth in there, with players later able to nurture profession-related skills to imbue a real sense of individuality to their heroes.

Add to this a new character creation and customisation mode – a series first – which allows you to edit every member of your group and then furnish them with all manner of items and peculiar-looking clothing that you find during your adventures, plus a great *Monster Hunter*-style dip-in-and-dip-out four-player local co-op mode that lets you invite up to three pals into your world to help on some of the more tricky quests, and you have a game that even goes some way towards besting Link's impressive adventures on Nintendo's handheld.

If you're a fan of the series looking for more of the same, or simply a series newcomer pining for a traditional top-down RPG to get stuck in to, then you certainly won't be disappointed by *Dragon Quest IX*.



OPINION

I haven't been able to put this down. In fact it's even been eating into my *Monster Hunter* playtime. I'm confident fans will be pleased with this latest instalment in the series. It's also perfectly suited to the DS and looks fab on the handheld.

Darran Jones

In A Nutshell

Maybe too simplistic for veteran JRPG gamers, but fans of Super Nintendo RPGs will delight in the wonderful world of *Dragon Quest IX*. If you're looking for the definitive RPG for the DS, look no further.

>> Scores

Presentation	89%
Graphics	85%
Sound	79%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	91%

Overall 90%

✱ VIRTUAL ROUND-UP

>> There's no better medium to find all your favourite retro games than the various download services. Here are this month's new additions

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

It's a rather quiet month for Wii owners, with only *Ufouria: The Saga* being of interest to us. Pity.

Shadow Of The Ninja
» System: NES
» Points: 500
» Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Ufouria: The Saga
» System: NES
» Points: 500
» Rating: ★★★★☆

PLAYSTATION NETWORK

It's been a disappointing month for PS3 owners with no new games announced. Here's hoping we actually get some next month.

GAME ROOM

The support for Game Room continues, but even we're beginning to get disappointed with the lack of new publisher support. Microsoft needs to get in Capcom, Sega, Taito and Namco, and do it quick.

✱ All games are 240 Points

Crackpots
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Kaboom!
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★★★☆

Star Strike
» System: Intellivision
» Rating: ★★★☆☆



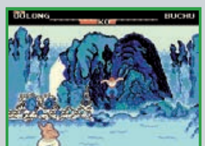
Juno First
» System: Arcade
» Rating: ★★★★★
» Unlike many of the games released this month on Game Room, this is an arcade game that doesn't already have a Live Arcade port, which certainly makes a nice change. The real reason you should be downloading this is due to the fact that it's a cracking shooter that fits the Game Room ethos perfectly.



Major Havoc
» System: Arcade
» Rating: ★★★★☆
» Another Game Room exclusive and another title that remains wonderful to play. It's certainly a tough little blaster and its inventiveness still shines through today. In fact, the only thing that really lets this port down is the lack of a rotary controller that can sometimes make certain levels needlessly fiddly.

Warlords: Arcade
» System: Arcade
» Rating: ★★★☆☆

Scooter Shooter
» System: Arcade
» Rating: ★☆☆☆☆



Yie Ar Kung-Fu
» System: Arcade
» Rating: ★★★☆☆
» Like this month's *Warlords*, this Konami fighter is another Game Room title that loses out because you can't play it online. It's still a fun single-player experience, but we feel that Microsoft is really missing out by not delivering proper online play. We don't all have friends who can pop around for local play.

Sky Diver
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Starmaster
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Utopia
» System: Intellivision
» Rating: ★★☆☆☆

Barnstorming
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★★☆☆



Gravitar
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★★☆☆
» We've already got the best version of *Gravitar*, so why give us another one? While this is a perfectly competent conversion, the superior arcade offering is already available, so simply pick that up instead. Constantly rehashing different versions of the same game was a big problem on Virtual Console, so we'd rather Microsoft didn't follow suit.

Fishing Derby
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★★★☆

Gyruss
» System: Arcade
» Rating: ★★★★★

Hover Force
» System: Intellivision
» Rating: ★☆☆☆☆

Enduro
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★★☆☆

Ice Hockey
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★☆☆☆☆

Tower Of Doom
» System: Intellivision
» Rating: ★★☆☆☆



Quadrun
» System: Atari 2600
» Rating: ★★☆☆☆
» Now this is one of the reasons why we love Game Room. *Quadrun* is a very rare game that was only available as an exclusive offer from the Atari Club magazine. It's not the greatest of games, but a boxed copy will cost several hundred dollars, so having it on Game Room is a very welcome and cheap alternative.

>> SOUL OF DARKNESS



» [DSiWare] Boss fights feature clever attack patterns that are really satisfying to work out.

Soul Of Darkness

THE BEST CASTLEVANIA YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** DSIWARE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 500 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** GAMELOFT » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1

It's a brave developer who releases a *Castlevania* clone on Nintendo's DS. After all, depending on the system you own, you have access to six excellent titles, which should be more than enough to cater for all your Metroidvania needs.

Unperturbed, Gameloft has stepped into the arena and not only released a fantastic game, but has also offered it for a tenth of the price of its competitors. *Soul Of Darkness* is simply wonderful. Granted, it doesn't have a bone of originality in its body – it steals ideas from *God Of War*, *Castlevania* and even *Wonder Boy III: The Dragon's Trap* – but it's put together with so much style and skill that it really doesn't matter.

After witnessing your beloved get kidnapped by a vampire, you set off in hot pursuit through some gorgeous-looking scenery that looks straight out of Konami's gothic franchise. Rather than rely on a whip, your weapon of choice is a handy fire sword that can be constantly upgraded by collecting purple orbs that defeated enemies drop. A short time later, you'll gain access to an ice spear that can be used to freeze enemies and access out of the way areas. Deftly switching between both items is the main focus of the game's puzzles, but later stages introduce the ability to change into various animals with unique abilities, which opens up *Soul Of Darkness* even more.

Add in some genuinely exciting and inventive boss battles and you have one of the greatest Metroidvania clones currently available. Now when are we getting a sequel?

OPINION

The fact that *Soul Of Darkness* is available for less than a fiver is simply incredible. Yes, it feels a little linear at times, but the beautiful visuals, clever puzzles and constant introduction of new gameplay elements makes this an essential purchase for any fan of *Castlevania*.

Darran Jones

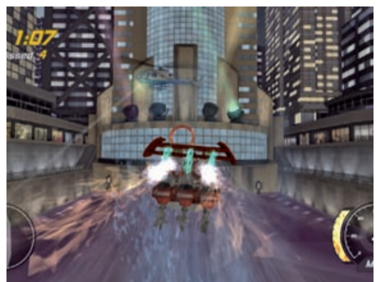
>> Scores

Presentation	70%
Graphics	92%
Sound	88%
Playability	94%
Addictivity	93%

Overall 92%

» [XBLA] These barrels may look innocent, but get too close and they'll explode, costing you precious seconds.





OPINION

There's not that much meat on *Hydro Thunder Hurricane*, but you'll be having so much fun that you won't notice. While there are only eight tracks on offer, the sheer variety and the solid range of modes ensure that you'll always have something to do, even when you've seen everything it has to offer. Well worth the asking price.

Stuart Hunt



Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge Special Edition

» **SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
» **PRICE:** 800 POINTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Excellent update of** the hit LucasArts game that improves on the *Monkey Island* update by adding voices to the old graphics and direct control. We're still not convinced by the new visuals, but there's no denying that this is the best version of the hit sequel.

>> Score **93%**



Pac-Match Party HD

» **SYSTEM:** iPAD
» **PRICE:** £1.19 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **To celebrate *Pac-Man*'s** 30th birthday, Namco released this interesting little puzzle game. It's a traditional take on an old concept, but introduces several interesting mechanics, including the ability to guide Pac-Man around with your finger. Sadly, it's too easy for its own good and we whizzed through it on our first turn.

>> Score **55%**

XBLA





» [XBLA] Keep inside the rings in order to get a high score. Easy, right? Wait until those water physics kick in…

Hydro Thunder Hurricane

YOU'LL WATER DOWNLOAD THIS STRAIGHT AWAY

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** N/A » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS » **PUBLISHER:** MICROSOFT » **DEVELOPER:** VECTOR UNIT » **PLAYERS:** 1-8

D.J

In a world that's constantly focusing on realistic visuals and real-life racing mechanics, it's refreshing to play something as old-school and fun as *Hydro Thunder Hurricane*. Part of Microsoft's Summer of Arcade roster – which also includes *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* and the excellent *Castlevania: Harmony Of Despair*, which we'll be reviewing next month – *Hydro Thunder Hurricane* takes the core elements of the original arcade game and builds on them admirably to create an extremely solid, if relatively short-lived, experience.

Although there are only eight stages on offer, each and every one is well-designed and full of sneaky short cuts that are just waiting to be exploited by daring players. They're also filled with plenty of hazards, ranging from strategically placed exploding barrels to huge monsters that, coupled with the 15 other boats, makes jostling for that coveted first place very tough indeed.

The racing itself is just as you'd expect: fast, furious and very, very silly. While there are some very convincing water physics on offer, the rough and tumble nature of the gameplay means it's all too easy to get hammered into walls, or flipped by a particularly large wave. This in itself would be fine, and even add to the fun, but *Hydro Thunder Hurricane* doesn't allow for slip-ups, and we've lost count of the times we failed to place in the top three because an unfair clip took us out and gave us no chance to recover.

Far better is the structure of the actual racing, which constantly awards you points for finishing in high positions, which in turn unlocks new levels, missions and boats so boredom rarely sets in. In addition to the core races you have Ring Master, Gauntlet and Championship. The latter is your standard tournament mode, while Ring Master has you negotiating strategically placed rings in the fastest time possible. Our favourite, however, is Gauntlet, which has you racing against the clock and trying to avoid the explosive barrels that line the waterways. It makes for some incredibly tense racing, especially when playing online.

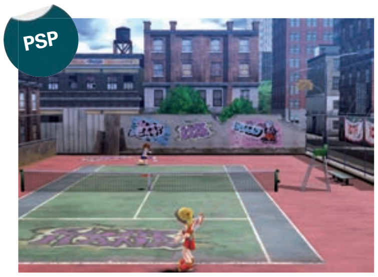
Hydro Thunder Hurricane does suffer from repetition and a frustrating difficulty level, but it remains a highly fun racer that does both the original arcade game and its Dreamcast predecessor proud.

>> Scores

Presentation	72%
Graphics	78%
Sound	66%
Playability	84%
Addictivity	78%

Overall 80%

PSP



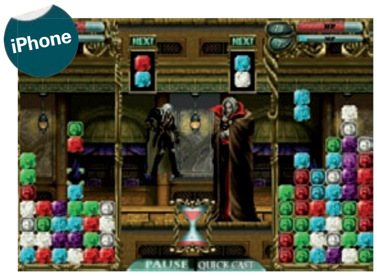
Everybody's Tennis

» **SYSTEM:** PSP
» **PRICE:** £19.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

>> **The PS2 game** gets shrunk down to the PSP with surprisingly good results. While it lacks the immediacy of *Everybody's Golf*, it nevertheless plays a decent game of tennis and is perfect for playing in short bursts. The only thing we don't like about it is that it can be quite hard to place certain shots, and the difficulty features some annoying spikes as you progress. Still good, clean fun, though.

>> Score **72%**

iPhone



Castlevania Puzzle: Encore Of The Night

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Konami has reinvented** *Symphony Of The Night* as a match-three puzzle game. It's sounds bizarre, but it actually works well, especially as Konami has done its best to ensure that it's different to similar titles. The only thing that lets *Encore Of The Night* down is twitchy controls; otherwise this is a fun puzzler that non-*Castlevania* fans will enjoy.

>> Score **68%**

iPhone



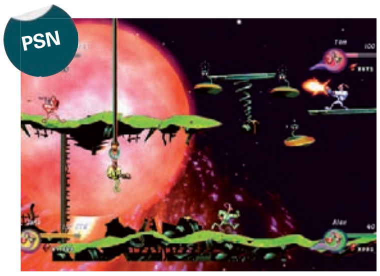
1942: First Strike

» **SYSTEM:** iPHONE/iPOD TOUCH
» **PRICE:** £1.79 » **PLAYERS:** 1

>> **Capcom makes an** admirable attempt to steal Cave's iPhone crown with *1942: First Strike*, but a number of factors let it down. The biggest issue is the fiddly controls, which are needlessly twitchy and feel archaic next to the graceful system implemented by Cave. Ultimately, though, *First Strike* suffers due to its mundane gameplay and uninspiring scoring system. Stick with *Espgaluda II*.

>> Score **48%**

PSN



Earthworm Jim HD

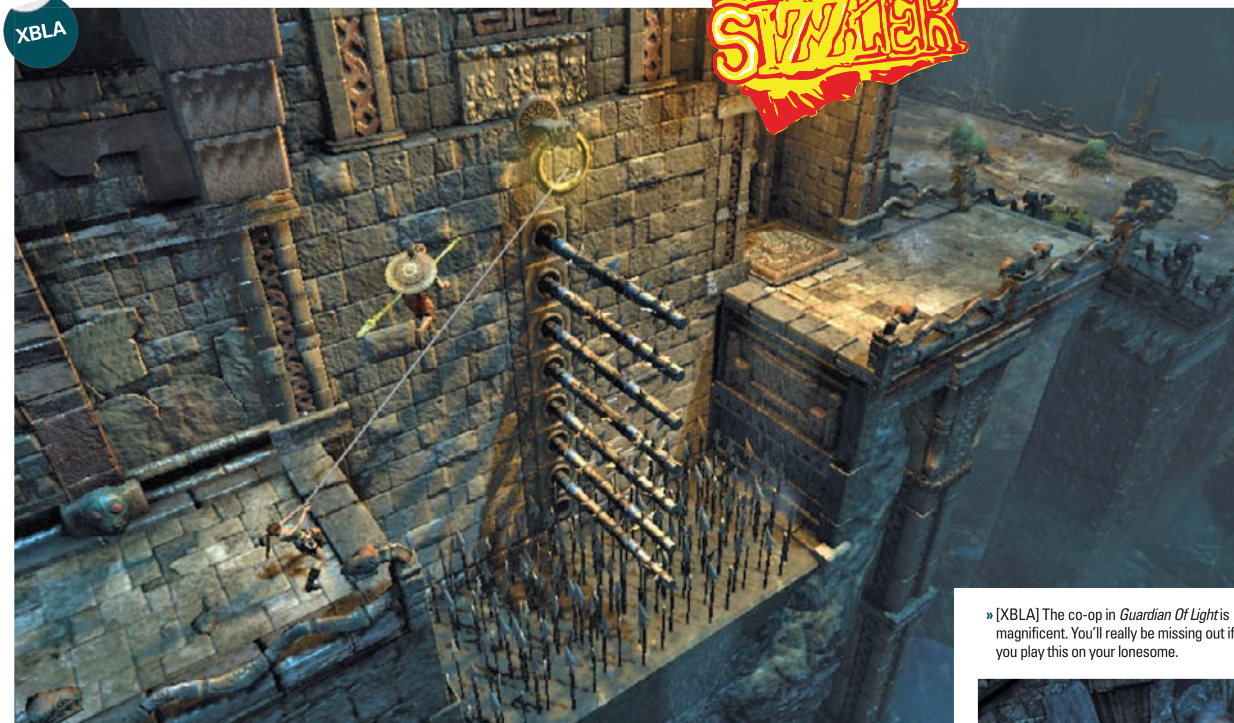
» **SYSTEM:** PSN
» **PRICE:** £7.99 » **PLAYERS:** 1 -4

>> **Now this is** great value for money. In addition to getting a super duper high-def remake of the hit 16-bit game, which remains great fun and brilliantly funny, Gameloft has included a surprisingly good multiplayer mode that has you working with up to three other Jims to complete each stage. It's an addition that works far better than it should, and only some spongy controls stop this from attaining greatness.

>> Score **88%**

>> LARA CROFT AND THE GUARDIAN OF LIGHT

XBLA



» [XBLA] The co-op in *Guardian Of Light* is magnificent. You'll really be missing out if you play this on your lonesome.

LIGHT YEARS AHEAD OF OTHER TOMB RAIDER GAMES

Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light



» [XBLA] Our only real issue with *Guardian Of Light* is that later levels suffer from repetition.



We were expecting good things after playing the recent demo, but we're still gobsmacked by just how good *Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light* actually is. In fact, we'll go out on that typical limb and state that this is the best *Tomb Raider* game we've played since the first one.

Of course, this isn't a proper *Tomb Raider* game, but the similarities are certainly there. You're still visiting tombs, shooting strange monsters and solving puzzles, but never has it felt so good.

Level design is not only extremely clever, but also looks sensational thanks to Crystal Dynamics' incredibly robust game engine. Its lighting is superb, giving a great feeling of depth on later stages, while animation is faultless. In short, it's the best-looking downloadable game we've played.

If *Guardian Of Light*'s visuals impress, then you'll be bowled over by its amazingly solid gameplay, which skilfully combines distinct playing styles – exploration and twin-stick shooting – into a hugely satisfying experience. The action comes thick and fast, with Lara and new pal Totec constantly getting assaulted by waves of enemies ranging from deranged giant lizards to angry natives. Lara also has access to a solid range of weaponry, which is handy, as later bosses can take a huge amount of firepower before they die.

It's Totec who's the real revelation, though, as he adds a dynamic new take to the puzzles. Lara can hop on the spears he throws to reach higher ledges, jump on his shield, use him as a counterpoint when swinging on her grappling hook and much, much more. He's integrated perfectly into the game, and the puzzles that need both characters to solve are incredibly satisfying.

Replay value is also high on the agenda. Each level has a number of bonus challenges to complete, seeking out handy artefacts power you up, and there are special tombs that house great pick-ups if you can solve them. Finally, the puzzles in the single-player are often completely different to those created for two players.

Later levels can get tiring due to the sheer numbers of enemies you have to cope with, and the camera restricts where you can move in co-op, but these are minor inconveniences. *The Guardian Of Light* is quite simply Lara's best adventure since her first outing in *Tomb Raider*. High praise indeed.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBOX LIVE ARCADE
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN, PC
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 1,200 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
- » **DEVELOPER:** CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2

BRIEF HISTORY

» Lara made her debut videogame appearance in *Tomb Raider* on the Sega Saturn in 1996. Since then she's become one of the most iconic characters in videogames, appearing in numerous sequels and spin-offs and even two movies starring Angelina Jolie.

OPINION



Initial wariness of Lara's new game was soon cast aside once I started playing it. Clever puzzles and plenty of *Robotron*-style shooting makes *Guardian Of Light* an exciting new addition to the *Tomb Raider* canon. A highly enjoyable adventure that even non-fans should enjoy.

Stuart Hunt

★ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Lara Croft And The Guardian Of Light

>> Actress Keeley Hawes once again voices Lara. She is best known for her roles in *Spooks* and *Ashes To Ashes*.

>> The latest artefact that Lara is looking for is the fabled Smoking Mirror. Totec is its protector.

★ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD

SUPER METROID (SNES)



▽ SOMETHING NEW

SHADOW COMPLEX (XBLA)



In a nutshell

The last few levels are frustratingly tough, but this remains a fantastic new addition to the long-running franchise that proves that you can teach an old dog new tricks.

>> Scores

Presentation	88%
Graphics	95%
Sound	85%
Playability	90%
Addictivity	88%
Overall	**90%**

It's a jungle out there. Swing through it



iPad

Printed full colour large format book

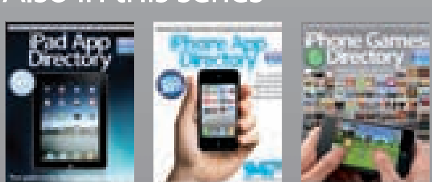
Kindle

Directory™

★★★★★

The definitive review listings for iPad, iPhone and Android apps

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HOMEBREW

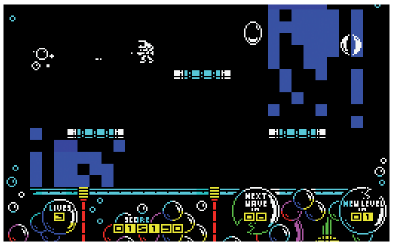
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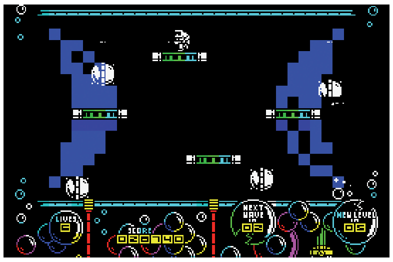


Before the reviews themselves, something of a rant that isn't aimed at anyone in particular but more for homebrew developers generally: when you're doing something like Pong, Combat or Gunslinger, for goodness sake put a one-player mode in – you're writing for a niche audience already, there's no point in limiting your game's exposure to a subsection of that niche!

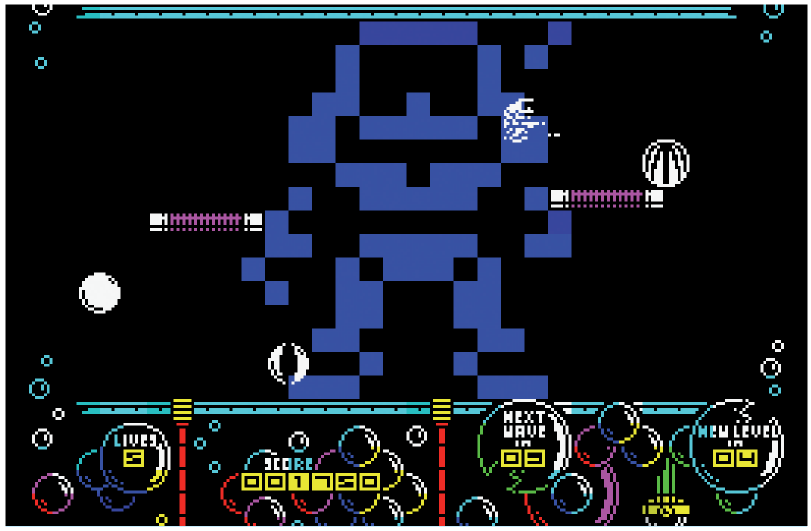
TROOPER: POINT 5

HE'S HALF THE MAN HE USED TO BE





» [Spectrum] Bounce bounce, c'mon bounce.



» [Spectrum] I'm forever shooting bubbles…

The Bog Brothers have been working on their platform-based blaster *Trooper* for a while now… but this isn't it! *Trooper: Point 5* started life as a sub game within the larger project but, after a little badgering from a play tester, it has been sent out as an advance party before the larger game is finished. It's an action game that is more than a little inspired by *Jetpac*; the titular Trooper is dumped into a nicely defined (if a tad sparse) single-screen battleground and, while being harassed by waves of enemies, must collect bonus items as they tumble from the heavens.

Grabbing enough of these trinkets before they have a chance to expire summons up the next attack wave and, once enough waves have been passed, the Trooper moves on to the next level. Not all of the falling objects are there to progress the game, however. Batteries improve the Trooper's weapon a bit, little men in bubbles award him with an extra life and the dynamite blows all on-screen enemies into smithereens.

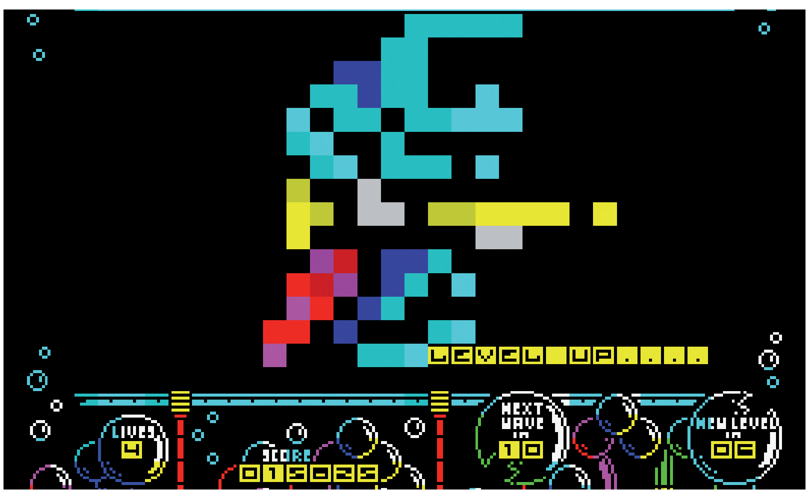
While the screens themselves are a little minimal – they contain just a couple of tastefully placed platforms and one of the in-game sprites zoomed up for a background – the graphics are of the quality we've come to expect from Jarrod Bentley, so the sprites are detailed and look good when animating while the platforms and status bar are well-drawn and colourful.

Sound, on the other hand, is somewhat variable, opening with an excellent piece of beeper music on the titles that leads into some relatively simple spot effects during play if the machine has an AY sound chip, and silence otherwise.

Jetpac has always been quite a hard act to follow, and the various attempts at borrowing from its design over have produced mixed results in the past, including some poor 'updated' versions (like *Jetboy* on the Atari 8-bit) where the delicate balance has been thrown radically off kilter. *Trooper: Point 5* even goes as far as simplifying the design by limiting the power of the player's weapon and removing the construction and fuelling of the rocket completely, but it's still entertaining to play and even offers more variety than its muse in some respects, changing the platform layout between stages.

Trooper: Point 5 certainly isn't perfect, though. Along with the lacklustre sound effects it doesn't offer a lot of variety in the enemies – the same six attack waves repeat on each level and new elements such as the patrolling buzz saws only appear quite late into the game. Progress through those waves can also be rather slow-paced, since collecting the quota of ten objects can take at least couple of minutes per wave or more if the game isn't feeling generous with the bonus items. But for those who like slower-paced action and don't mind some repetition in what they're blasting, *Trooper: Point 5* is a very good diversion and surprisingly addictive.

87%



» [Spectrum] Taking it to the next level.



» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM
» **DEVELOPED BY:** THE BOG BROTHERS
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/TROOPER5
» **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** FREE
» **REVIEWED BY:** JASON KELK

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

VIRUS

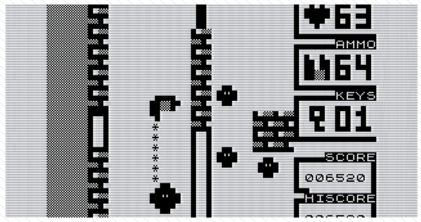
REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

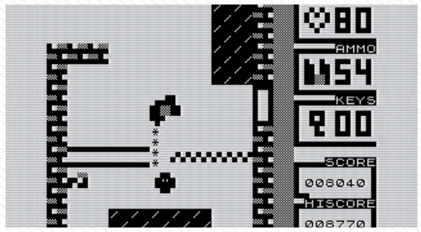
» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR ZX81 » **DEVELOPER:** BOB SMITH
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/VIRUS » **PRICE:** FREE

We love badly maintained viral research facilities here at **Retro Gamer**. No, seriously, we do – there are so many games that wouldn't exist if these places were accident-free. Take Macrobiology Industries, for example. The lab's main fuses were popped by a spectacularly raucous party and now their stock of swine flu vaccine, left to its own devices at room temperature with some dodgy pills and a half-eaten sandwich, has mutated.

The phrase "tense scrolling action on the ZX81" isn't one we often use in these reviews, but that's exactly what *Virus* is; there are some similarities to games like *Into The Eagle's Nest* or even *Gauntlet*. The floor plans are viewed from above and scroll in all four directions as the player blasts away the mutated monstrosities lurking around corners, their limited supply of ammo and health – which constantly decreases – can both be topped up with bonus items and the overall objective is to disinfect each stage then get to the exit.

85%





» [ZX81] Forward this message onto everybody.

KING OF PONG

REVIEWED BY: JASON KELK

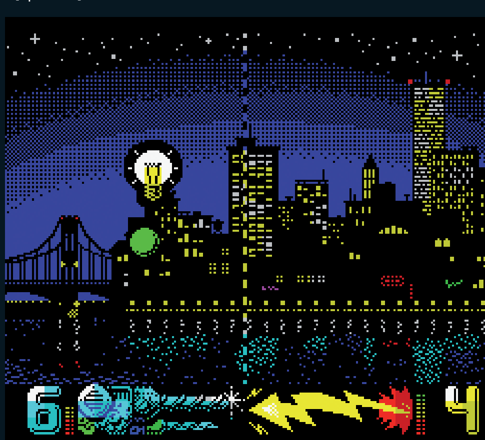
» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** RICARDO NIEMIETZ
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/KING-OF-PONG » **PRICE:** FREE

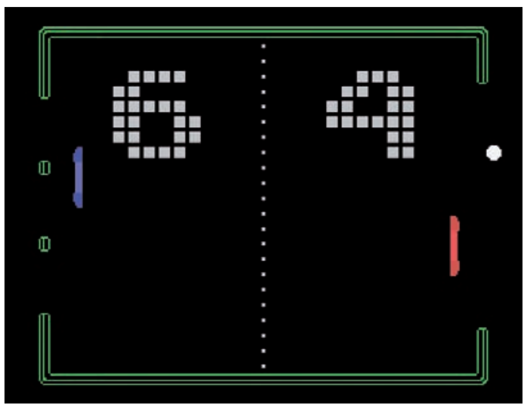
Wimbledon may be over for this year, but now you can relive some of the highlights in your own living room, all without the risk of knocking over a vase with the racquet. The most striking things about *King Of Pong* (after the name) are the graphics; they're extremely colourful, detailed and plentiful since the developer has crammed a wide range of images in. Although the ball does rely on a 'time-sharing' technique to avoid colour clash, meaning that there is a noticeable flickering that might become irritating after prolonged playing.

We've got a couple of *Pong* variants this issue and this one is the stronger, adding weapons for both players to take pot-shots at each other with and random collectables that materialise within the play area to reverse the scores, magnetise one of the bats or strobe all of the colours. But it's still *Pong*, so while being a reasonable and good-looking implementation there's a limit to its longevity – but it's at least amusing for a couple of sets.

74%

» [Spectrum] The ball's had an idea!

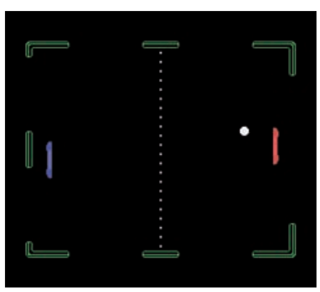




» [MSX] Still missed it!

NEOPONG

» **FORMAT:** MSX » **DEVELOPER:** Z80ST-SOFTWARE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/NEOPONG » **PRICE:** FREE



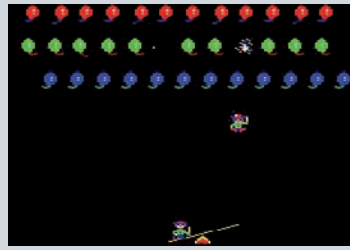
Ah, the sound of leather on willow… that's tennis, right? Never mind, because this is actually another *Pong* and, as with the other title reviewed this month, the developer has tweaked the design – both players can change the shape of the playfield during play. These changes are random, opening holes in the upper and lower walls to allow the ball to wrap around vertically or placing barriers behind either player's bat – it's something of a gamble and occasionally works against the player using it.

This altering of the arena makes for an interesting change to the mechanic in the short term, but both *NeoPong* and *King Of Pong* suffer quite a bit from one major deficit – they don't offer a single-player mode. That's fine for players who have spouses, children or particularly talented pets to compete against, but few homebrew gamers tend to have those options.

65%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



>> Roll up, roll up!

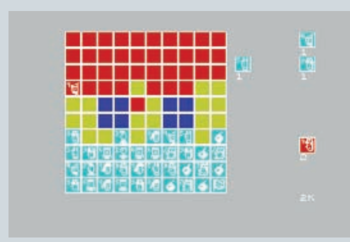
Although it doesn't appear to have been christened yet, a new BBC Micro game based on *Circus Circus* is currently well into production. Judging by the screenshots and video footage that has so far been posted at Retro Software's forum, it's looking rather spiffy. The thread, which contains screenshots of the game so far and a link to YouTube, can be found hiding behind **http://kikstart.eu/circus**.



» [Spectrum] Rootin' and indeed tootin'.

>> Mad Dogs and Englishmen

There's also a bizarre attempt on the go right now to convert *Mad Dog McCree* to the Spectrum, which relies on a recently developed video streaming system for the Spectrum that depends on a hardware interface, so it won't exactly be available on a stock tape-based 48K rubber keys! The link below shows prototype code so everything is a little rough, but it's a brave attempt! **http://kikstart.eu/mccree**.



» [Spectrum] Stratego in just 2K of memory!

>> Anyone got a microscope?

The MiniGame competition for 2010 has been launched… sort of. The official site has been offline for a while now, so regular contributor Dr Beep has taken it upon himself to run the competition this year. Cramming a complete game into 4K or less stands a good chance of neutering it, but there have been a few standout entries over the decade or thereabouts the competition has been running.

HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» *Hydorah* only features one difficulty setting.

>> War has never been so much fun

It's taken an age to get here, but horizontally scrolling blaster *Hydorah* has finally been released. For those who haven't heard about it already, it's probably best to think of it as the love child of all the classic Konami and Taito shoot-'em-ups from the 1980s, lovingly upgraded to add large blocks of resolution in the process. Getting it going is a little fiddly (for reasons best known to themselves, the developer is distributing an ISO image) so we'll have to see if it's worth that effort. **http://kikstart.eu/hydorah**

>> Go to your brother, kill him with your gun

As fans of indie games we like *Farbs* and we like *OddBob*, but which is better? There's only one way to find out – **http://kikstart.eu/fight**. After a war of words on Twitter, the two have decided to duke it out publicly with a new site called Indie Kombat. It's all tongue-in-cheek and the language not safe for work, but the mashed-up games they'll produce should be fun!

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on *Retro Gamer*'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at *Space Disposal*.

IN SPACE, NOBODY can hear you dispose of waste. Abandoned nuclear missiles that have been left lying around 16 derelict spaceships need to be disposed of – but once they start moving, the missile carrier won't stop! Manoeuvre it through tricky corridors and defences to the disposal chamber. **http://kikstart.eu/disposal**.

REMAKES WE'VE BEEN PLAYING. . .



Remake of the Mouth



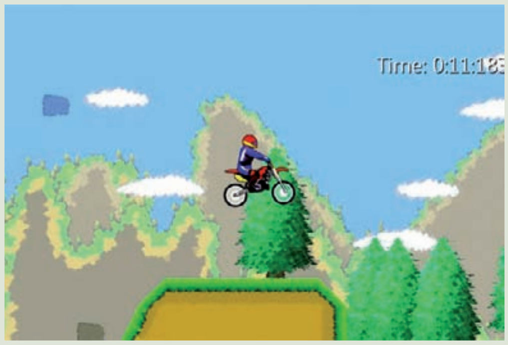
APPLE JACK

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/APPLE-JACK

Jack's faithful dog has been kidnapped and is being held at the top of Mount Snowdon, so he'll have to fight his way through five counties – no, that's not a typo, the levels are all named after villages and grouped into counties, starting in Suffolk – with nothing but his wits, the ability to lob enemies at each other to dispose of them, some mad wall-jumping skills and an apple for a head!

The baddies he will be facing include pandas, runaway washing machines and pigs wearing tutus and, rather than reaching an exit in the multi-directional scrolling landscape, Jack must defeat them all to complete a level. That means standing on something's head, picking it up and bouncing it off one of its compatriots to produce a shower of coins, and smashing multiple pairs of enemies in quick succession both bumps up the score multiplier and increases the number of coins disgorged.

There's quite a puzzle element as well. Some stages see Jack colliding objects with the same colour of shield to defeat them, while others require him to travel over spike pits on the heads of foes or figure out how to destroy certain objects without getting trapped in the process. *Apple Jack* manages to exercise both the reflexes and the brain and, considering just how many challenges have been crammed in, has a very reasonable price tag of 80 Microsoft Points.



OLD SCHOOL RACER

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/OSR

The action in *Old School Racer* is quite reminiscent of 8-bit time trial racers such as *Kikstart*; the kind of games that used a physics model that leant more towards entertaining the player than it did realism, so the player will spend more time somersaulting through the air than actually riding in a more conventional manner.

There isn't any scoring, but riders can earn medals for completing a course within a prescribed time limit and golden tickets are scattered around the levels (occasionally in inaccessible places) that can be traded in for better bikes. Upgrading is a must because, even with the skill required to beat the hard levels, they're not possible to beat without a decent set of wheels.



SPACE INVADERS

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/INVADERS

Good old *Space Invaders* – we expect that just about every homebrew developer out there has a clone of it in their back catalogue somewhere! And this is probably the most faithful Game Maker implementation we've seen to date as well, which is notable in itself since this is author Dabooge's first completed game.

All of the elements are present and at least reasonably correct; the Invaders trudge back and forth, dropping down and speeding up when expected and the tank sits at the bottom trying to blow them away. Okay, so the more hardcore *Space Invaders* fans will probably find this rendition just a little too easy overall and something like *Invaders! Probably From Space!* offers more variety, but for nostalgic wallowing it's good stuff.



HOMEBREW HEROES

JARROD "BINMAN" BENTLEY (ALONG WITH SEAN "CODENAMEV" GEE) HAS JUST RELEASED HIS SECOND GAME OF 2010, THE JETPAC-INSPIRED TROOPER: POINT 5. SINCE HE ALREADY HAS AN INTERESTING HISTORY WITH THE 8-BITS, THAT'S ALREADY A COUPLE OF GREAT REASONS FOR AN INTERVIEW!

Q&A

Retro Gamer: What was it that originally got you into programming games and how did you end up on the Spectrum?

Jarrod Bentley: I was given a 48k Speccy for Christmas back in 1982. From the beginning I was interested in graphics; pushing what you could do with the limitations of the machine. Back then Ultimate games stood head and shoulders above the rest for me. Then Steven Crow and Joffa Smith came along, games started to look as good as they played and I wanted to do the same. Then in the early Nineties I was given a break by Dennis Mulliner who had designed *Butch Hard Guy*. He made a call to Dave Thompson and got me some work designing backgrounds for their new game *Turbo The Tortoise*.

RG: You worked on these machines back in the heyday of the 8-bits; what made you return to them now?

JB: It started with visiting Byte Back last year; it really opened my eyes. I met Martyn Carroll and bored him with my past gaming exploits, then there was Jonathan Cauldwell doing a game in a day and I met my all-time hero Joffa Smith, who sadly isn't with us any more. Soon after I decided to join the World of Spectrum forums as I wanted to be more involved with like-minded people sharing their passion for the Speccy and it's great to meet up with them at events. Then there's a whole host of development tools complemented by some incredible emulators that mean you don't need a load of hardware, just a comfy chair and a laptop.

I decided it was time to get to grips with Jonathan's Arcade Game Designer – it has an 'easy' scripting engine, which meant I didn't have to learn Z80, and to this day I still haven't learned how to use Assembly. But it was during a chat about AGD with Jonathan at the Video Game Nation exhibition that he asked me if I would like to do some graphics for his game in a day. A chance to work on a game after 17 years? Too bloody right. The result was *HomeBrew*, so it's his fault, really.

RG: And how would you say those two eras compare?

JB: For me, development hasn't really changed from when I worked on *Turbo* and *Dizzy*. Back then we would run assemblers, compilers and art packages on Atari STs linked to a target machine – now the target machine is an emulator. At least today I can use art packages that reproduce colour clash rather than drawing in monochrome and working out in your head what attributes would go where. It's the forums that make all the difference – they're your target audience and beta testers. Without feedback I don't think *Point 5* would have turned out as good considering it started out as a secret level in another game.

RG: *Trooper: Point 5* is something of a prelude for a larger game; can you tell us a little more about it?

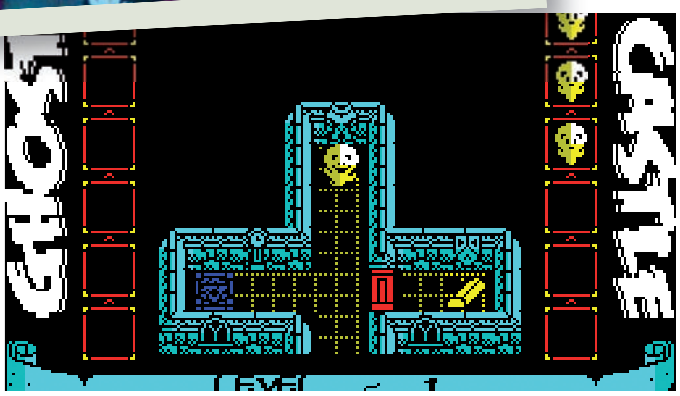
JB: It's a space-themed arcade adventure inspired by games such as *Dan Dare*. The story is that we are losing the war against the Geek as they seem to have an unlimited supply of armaments and continually defeat us at every engagement. Intelligence discovers an automated weapons factory near to a collapsing star in a distant sector of the galaxy and you have been sent on what could be a suicide mission. I started it last year but I'd get so far and think 'No, don't like that' and start again. I think I've restarted it about four times.

RG: Is there anything you want to try but haven't found time for so far?

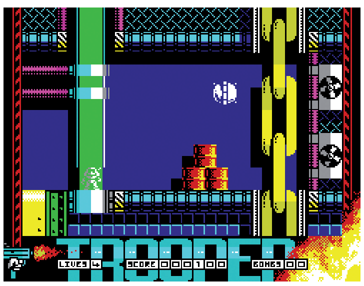
JB: I'd love to do a full colour scrolling shooter, like *Light Force* but in the style of *194x* with *R-Type*-style power ups. I've got some backgrounds and sprites somewhere.

RG: Finally, what advice can you give to anybody wanting to become involved in homebrew development?

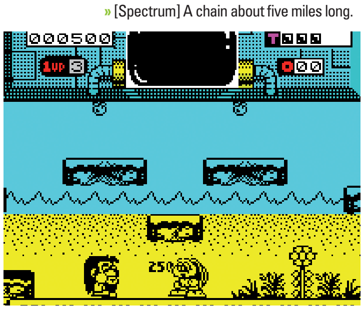
JB: It's got to be a machine you really have a passion for and start off with a simple idea. *The Trooper* platform game is quite complicated as a first attempt using AGD; however, what I had learned from that helped to develop better scripting for *Point 5*, which I've started to reverse engineer into the platform game.



» [Spectrum] Is there anybody there…?



» [Spectrum] A chain about five miles long.



» [Spectrum] It's *Turbo* Time!

HIGH FIVE

The Indie Games that Jarrod can't live without

1. **W*H*B (Spectrum)** It's what homebrew's all about – a great puzzler with community-designed levels.
2. **VIRUS (ZX81)** The low-res graphics are so well animated it makes me want to buy a ZX81; the loading screen influenced *Trooper*'s.
3. **SPLATTR (Spectrum)** Superb use of colours, big chunky sprites and instantly addictive gameplay keeps you coming back.
4. **BATTERY'S NOT PRECLUDED (Spectrum)** Jonathan takes a really simple idea and executes it with bags of playability all on a single screen!
5. **INVASION OF THE ZOMBIE MONSTERS (Spectrum/MSX)** The cut-scenes are inspired and looks and plays like a SNES game but on a Speccy/MSX.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

ARCADE LOVE

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I've never written to you before, but I felt compelled to after reading Matthew Lightbourne's ridiculous message in issue 77 about Game Room. I have been collecting and thoroughly enjoying **Retro Gamer** since issue 2 onwards (I managed to buy issue 1 from eBay for £35!). I may not be interested in every single item in each issue, but it doesn't detract from it at all. I am extremely grateful that you took over the reins of the mag and I really look forward to each issue so please do not take any notice of him.

I started off by playing endless arcade machines in my youth – I even blagged a summer job with Bell Fruit who used to supply arcade machines to pubs and then bought my own ZX Spectrum followed by a Mega Drive, PlayStation, Xbox, Xbox 360 and I now own a MAME arcade machine.

One feature I would love to see you do is every month would be an article on classic arcade machines (the reason all of us are into games anyway) that features hints and cheats about each game. It would have been great to see that sort of treatment on your recent *Ghosts 'N Goblins* feature. I'd also love features on *Exed*, *Time Pilot*, *Vanguard* and other classic arcade shooters.

All the best, Mark Burden, Devizes

Thanks for the kind words, Mark, and worry not, Darran has thick skin, so doesn't get put off by the occasional negative comments the magazine receives. As for your request for more arcade features, we already run Coin-Op Capers and you've no doubt seen the recent Ultimate Guide as well. We do have a few other arcade-related projects lined up, but we're afraid you'll have to wait and see what they are.



» **[Xbox 360] Mark Burden feels that there should be more arcade content in the magazine. Does anyone agree with him?**

RAVE ABOUT CAVE

Dear Darran,

I've been watching and enjoying your YouTube channel for several months now and am really enjoying it. I love getting an insight into your gaming interests outside of the magazine and it's great to see that you genuinely love retro games.

I have recently noticed that you have been collecting Japanese shoot-'em-ups for the Xbox 360 (a genre that I myself am very fond of playing) and I was wondering if you were planning to give any of them any coverage within your magazine, as an interview with the Cave team would be absolutely fantastic.

James Bell, via email

Darran's glad that you're enjoying his channel and he has been threatening to do a feature about the Xbox 360's shooters for a couple of issues now. We would absolutely love to do an interview with the guys from Cave, but so far they have declined us. We will keep plugging away, though, and will hopefully wear them down soon.

STAR LETTER

GOODBYE GAMING LEGENDS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I read with great sadness that Chris Sievey and Jonathan Smith died recently. The reason for this sadness was not only due to the loss of two talented people, but that there was so little fanfare about their actual passing. While I never really played *The Biz* or followed the work of Frank Sidebottom, I used to love playing Jonathan's games on my Spectrum back in the day. I adored hammering the buttons on my Speccy while playing *Hyper Sports* and taking out bad guys in *Cobra* and *Green Beret* and I'm not ashamed to admit that as soon as I read about Jonathan's passing, I booted up both games and had a good old blast on them.

My original point, though, is this: there are some incredibly talented names in this industry, who have not only pioneered cutting-edge technology, but have also given millions of people countless hours of fun. Michael Jackson's passing made the news, as I'm sure will countless other entertainers' deaths. Will the likes of Matthew Smith, Shigeru Miyamoto and Peter Molyneux be remembered in the same way? I think not.

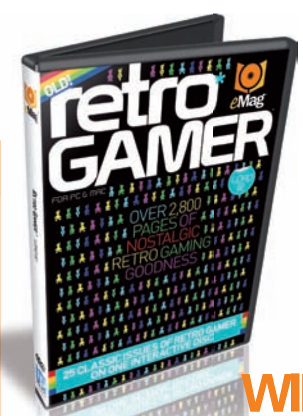
Apologies for the morbid tone, I just want to see my beloved coders get the attention they so obviously deserve.

Oliver Porter, Reading



» **Jonathan 'Joffa' Smith is no longer with us, but his games live on.**

The loss of Chris Sievey and Jonathan Smith has affected a lot of people within the retro community. Frustratingly, however, it's still seen by many as an unimportant pastime, despite being bigger than the music and film industries. As for whether gaming celebs will get the reputation they deserve in the future? We'll have to wait and see.



WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 2**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…



CONTACT US

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Email: retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk



YOUTUBE UPDATE

WITH THE DREAMCAST collection now whittled down to 26 of the very best games (plus every Japanese shmup), Darran's now focusing on collecting for the Game Boy Micro. Probably because it's effectively the handheld SNES he always dreamed of.
www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz



Darran's been slowly building his collection of 360 shmups. Expect a feature soon. Maybe…

GOLDEN SIGH

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

First things first, I love the magazine, especially when you cover all things Nintendo 64 and Sega! However, I've just finished reading the article on the up and coming *GoldenEye* remake. Now don't get me wrong – I'm awaiting it with an open mind – but don't you think this is definitely a case of if it isn't broke…? I mean, I was playing the original the other night and there is, in my opinion, absolutely nothing wrong with it. I understand the appeal for newer and younger gamers to experience a classic on a more familiar format, but I mean come on! Daniel Craig!? Are they serious!? It's a Brosnan film! That just sucks! However, like I said, I'm awaiting it with an open mind and looking forward to the next issue! Keep it up!

Johnny Revell

You do raise plenty of valid points about *GoldenEye*, but we're feeling positive about the direction it's heading in, especially as all the original multiplayer maps are included. We also understand your reservations about using Daniel Craig, but considering Brosnan rarely featured in the game, we don't really see it as being much of an issue.

SCORE WARS

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Greetings! I've been a subscriber to your wondrous mag for a few months now, and though I have almost nothing but praise to give, something has been bothering me since our relationship began. Like a number of your fans, I'm not entirely convinced by your RetroRated section within the magazine. I certainly understand the purpose it serves, and it's nice to see new instalments of old franchises reviewed with reference to the originals, so it's not the concept that actually bothers me.

No, what I find vexing is the strange decision to have a rating for graphics. Frankly, number scores in reviews are somewhat pointless in my opinion anyway, but surely rating a game's graphics in a magazine called **Retro Gamer** is entirely redundant? It feels to me like an attempt at pleasing people who care more about visual niceties than I, and though it might not be, that's what it seems like. I'm merely a loyal worshipper questioning his deity's commandments, but it's a valid complaint, I feel.

Ciaran McConville, Poole

Thanks for taking the time to write to us about your concern, Ciaran. Generally you're right. A magazine about old games

> "Surely rating a game's graphics in a magazine called Retro Gamer is redundant?"

RETROBATE PROFILE



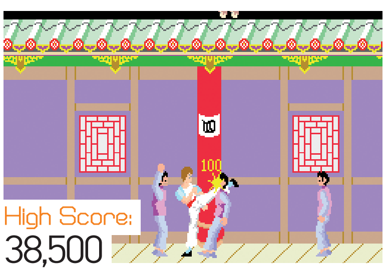
Name:	Paul Buhagiar
Joined:	20 Feb 2010
Location:	Australia
Occupation:	I.T.
Website:	Not given
Fave Games Systems:	Dreamcast, Colecovision, PC Engine, NES



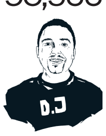
[Wii] Johnny isn't too convinced about *GoldenEye*, but we're still keeping the faith that it will be a worthy homage.

BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



High Score: 38,500



DARRAN

CHOSEN GAME: KUNG FU MASTER

Why I picked it: I'm a glutton for punishment.

Handy tip: Make sure that you always use your fists when fighting enemies – you'll get a lot more points if you do so.



High Score: 11,083 (normal mode)



CRAIG

CHOSEN GAME: BIT PILOT

Why I picked it: Ever since I installed the game on my iPhone, its retro charms and addictive qualities have refused to let go.

Handy tip: Sometimes subtler movements are the key to survival.



High Score: 5,446



DAVID

CHOSEN GAME: MANIC MINER

Why I picked it: Not the best score admittedly, but something to make you dig out this gem.

Handy tip: Just leave your sense of reality at home and plough on through.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, **Retro Gamer** asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite strategy game?

Sputryk Although I thoroughly enjoy the two Spectrum classics, *Vulcan* and *Rebelstar Raiders*, I think I must plump for the Amiga's *Battle Isle*, but it's a tough decision.

sirclive1 The *Lords Of Midnight* - predictable, but it is amazing. Gathering your armies and setting up your Lords in various Citadels around the land to stop the Doomguard is just as good today as it was over 25 years ago.

r0jaws Real-time strategy is easily my favourite genre. Firm favourites have to be *Age Of Empires II*, *Warcraft II* and *Dawn Of War* (including all its expansions up to *SoulStorm*). There is just nothing quite so satisfying as building up an all-conquering force and just obliterating the opposition.

SonicTheHedgehog If all strategy games count then *Civilization 3* and the *Conquests* expansion pack is the best ever.

RalphMilne'sLeft Foot *Herzog Zwei* – The Grand Daddy of the real-time strategy genre. Giant transforming robots and a killer soundtrack. All kinds of win.

Retro_Heart *RollerCoaster Tycoon 3* by a country mile for me. I still play it occasionally all these years later. Like *Sim City 4*, it had its possibilities vastly expanded thanks to user-created custom scenery/rides etc.

HalcyonDaze00 *Laser Squad*, *X-COM - UFO Enemy Unknown* and *Breach 2* are my three favourites, and if I had to pick one it would probably have to be *X-COM*. It's a shame that the turn-based strategy game has pretty much disappeared.

Graham Humphrey *Space Crusade* on the Amiga. A conversion of a Games Workshop board game, with three players it's a wonderfully tense and atmospheric experience. The expansion disk with extra missions is as hard as nails, though.

ipmarks It's a close call for me between *Lords Of Midnight* and *Rebelstar Raiders*. In the end I think I'll go for *Lords Of Midnight*. I've never felt so immersed in a world as in that one – I used to love just hiding out in the mountains.

fulgenzio *Final Fantasy Tactics*, of course.

DanWelsh86 *Civilization II* – and none of the 'pretend' *Civs* without Meier's help with the development. I've spent countless hours on all the *Civs* from the second one up and none has managed to captivate me more than the second. The music was immense; I never seemed to get bored of it and can still remember it now. *Civ IV* is a cracking game as well, along with the third, but the second… The second was a game of such greatness no other game in this genre has come close to matching and I cry myself to sleep when reminded of it.

Confessor *Civilization* for the sheer pleasure of nuke-bombing the last remains of primitive tribes on Earth. Also, *Dune 2* if it can be considered.

The Mask Seller *Advance Wars* on the GBA; the first and only strategy game I've ever bothered with. Absolutely splendid.

QuantumCrayons *Command & Conquer* series by far. Got the boxset and everything.

DrBlue *Napalm* for the Amiga; great game released in 1998, which was well into the twilight of the system.

Roo *Pikmin 2* would be mine. Where most sequels simply add more for the hell of it, *Pikmin 2* knew exactly where to expand and where to hold back. Its all-round appeal as a real-time strategy game is untouched by anything else.

Jeremiah Jones As far as the turn-based strategy role-playing variation goes, *Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness* on PlayStation 2 is as good as it gets. How many games can you think of that actually encourage playing as dirty as possible?

Liveinabin *Murgatroyd's Revenge* for the ZX81 by Cambridge Computing. It was a kind of turn-based *Pac-Man* with weapons (mines and glue) where you'd input three commands at a time (ie NNE) moving your little chap (who was represented by your initial) avoiding the ghosts (inverse quotes, obviously) while trying to pick up the key to escape from the maze. A genius game, which I was an idiot to sell with my ZX81 in '85. I want another copy.

Mordminister *Rogue Planet*, anyone? Okay, it's not retro, but an *Advance Wars* rip-off with *Mass Effect* rip-off music – how can you resist?

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

DID YOU POKE?

MattyC64c So how many of you used reset carts and inserted POKES from magazine listings like *Zzap 64*? Did you save them to tape to use again, and how did you save them anyway?

merman Used a few listings in my time, but didn't get a cartridge capable of resetting until 1990/1991. Even then, I tried not to cheat too often.

Alarm On the Speccy, I used to 'reverse engineer' Multiface POKEs (I never owned one) to help create type-in listings for games.

crusto I used to POKE my CPC games all the time. Computing with the Amstrad CPC had a pretty good POKEs section. I used to save them to tape if I remember rightly. Most were written by a guy called CJ Pinder, I think. Christian Pinder, maybe?

RUBBISH FIGHTERS

Liamh1982 Played *Ultra Vortek* on the Jaguar? Makes *Kasumi Ninja* look good…

DrBlue Surely either *Rise Of The Robots* or *Clayfighter* on the N64 takes the worst beat-'em-up crown?

Katzkatz *Pitfighter* is terrible on any system, and of course as much as I loved *Street Fighter II* the version on the Amiga was dire. I know it has been said before, but it can never be forgotten *shakes fist at US Gold for making such a crap conversion*.

Megamixer *Fight Box*. Adapted from one of those programs where the contenders obviously pretended they could see their virtual creation fighting when they were probably staring at an empty desk. It was interesting at the time but I'd never watch it now.

EASY SHMUPS

Sir Hilary Bray I think one of the things that puts me off with regards to shooters is that it's an unwritten law that you die after one hit. Honestly, in every shooter I've ever played it's one hit and you are dead. Are there any easier shooters out there that could appeal to an average gamer like me?

paranoid marvin Maybe you should try something with a power bar rather than one where one shot equals death? What you want to steer away from perhaps as well is games where dying loses all your power ups, making some games virtually impossible to beat. *R-Type* is a prime example.

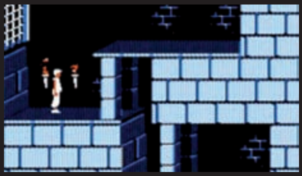
Graham Humphrey *Agony* on the Amiga isn't that hard – after two goes I got some way into level four.

Ferret Oxide I always found *Silkworm* on the Spectrum pretty easy, especially if you're playing it in co-op.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which Prince Of Persia is the best?

Prince Of Persia (Apple II) | POP: The Forgotten Sands (Wii)





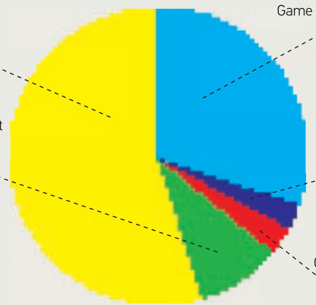
88% | 12%

retrogarden Big fan of the original. Tough, but it blew me away the first time I played it.

Miketendo *Forgotten Sands*. The games before *Sands Of Time* are just too clunky for me.

HOT TOPIC

Best Handheld



"The Lynx and GameGear both kind of defeated the object by not being conveniently portable and having a battery life of about eight minutes." **– FatTrucker**

"The Game Boy and games cost hardly anything, so it's the best handheld for anyone wanting to start a collection or get into handheld gaming." **– Tellah**



» [Wii] Under our new scoring system we'd give *Super Mario Galaxy 2* Commodore 64 for its graphics and Amstrad for overall rating. Actually, this isn't going to work, is it?

shouldn't get caught up at all about visual fidelity, as we all know that gameplay will always rule. Call us sticklers for tradition, but we use it simply so people can get a gauge and nothing more. Ideally we'd be content to rate games on an 8-bit scale system with ZX80 being the equivalent of a one and an Amstrad CPC representing a 10, but we'd upset so many readers it just wouldn't be worth it. Funny, though…

NAME THAT GAME

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I've been thinking about a game and just can't get it out of my head. I used to play it in the arcades all the time during the late Eighties and it was a really fun shoot-'em-up. You took control of a helicopter that looked a little like *Airwolf* and there was a truly amazing soundtrack. Oh and I'm pretty sure that when you blew things up there was the sound of a horse whinnying. Yes, it sounds amazingly bizarre, but I used to love playing this and really want to rediscover it. Any help you can give me would be greatly appreciated.

Matthew James via email

Well Matthew, you're in luck. We were actually playing this a few months back. We're pretty confident that the game you're describing is *Twin Eagle – Revenge Joe's Brother*. It's a slick shmup that has you playing as a helicopter and it has a modern day setting. Created by Seta, it sticks in the mind because the game speeds up at certain stages and starts playing soft rock. Oh, and that whinnying noise happens whenever you pick up power-ups.

> "I'm pretty sure that when you blew things up there was the sound of a horse whinnying"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Loneliness

After just having a two-week honeymoon, Stuart's headed off for yet another holiday. As a result, Darran has often been spotted walking slowly around the office with a forlorn look on his face, striking up conversations with people who clearly don't want to speak to him. He was last seen underneath his desk in the foetal position, quietly crying to himself. On the other hand, though, he's never done so much work in a single week.

A SMALL REQUEST

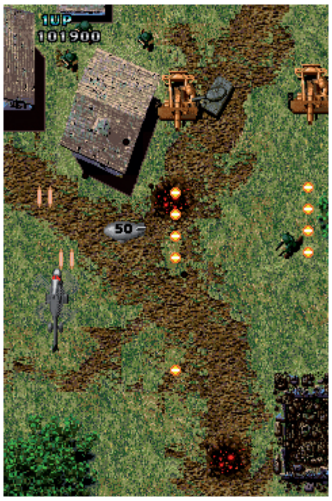
Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I have been a reader of **Retro Gamer** for some time and was wondering how I could submit a request for a system to have a small feature done on it?

My best friend passed away recently and was a massive retro fan with a nice collection of ZX81s, C64s and Amigas. He loved his C64 and was the only person I know who used a SX-64 Portable as his main games machine growing up in the Eighties.

Would a small bit on this relatively missing gem of the C64's history be something that could be done as a future feature? Ideally I'd love to see him get mentioned in an article, as it would mean a lot as a keepsake for his family who got him his first ZX81. His uncle who, I believe, died shortly after my friend received it, handed down his SX-64 to him. Sorry to bother you with this, and even if nothing can be done, thanks for your time.

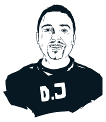
Dean Cooper via email



First off Dean, we're sorry to hear about your loss. As for the feature, if we can find someone with the relevant knowledge then we'll certainly put something together. There have been a lot of requests lately for roundups on more obscure machines, so this is definitely something we'll look into.

CURRENTLY PLAYING





DARRAN

Shinobi

I'm actually completing games I play, as opposed to leaving them on my shelves. I've already finished off *Shadow Of The Colossus* and am now battling my way through this frustrating reboot of the *Shinobi* franchise.



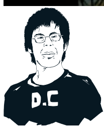


CRAIG

Pix'N Love Rush

With many levels lasting mere seconds, there's a whiff of *WarioWare* about this game, but the retro-style graphics and gameplay also bring to mind *Super Mario, Rainbow Islands, Bubble Bobble* and more.





DAVID

Oddworld: Abe's Odyssey

Following the news that Abe is set to make a welcome return to our screens, it was just a short step to paying £4 for the original on PSN and reliving those joyous memories all over again. Bless you, Abe.

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nextmonth

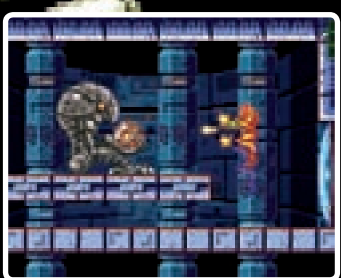
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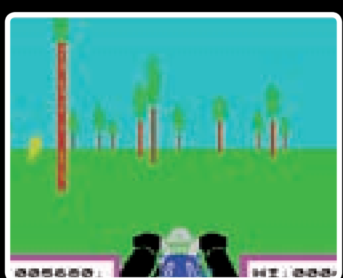
Your ultimate guide to Joe's finest hour

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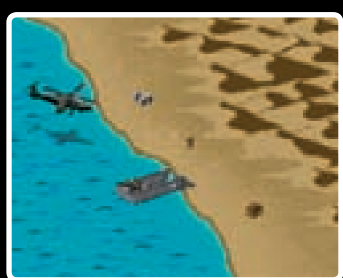
Metroid: Zero Mission

■ In a brand new feature we take a look at the last-gen games we predict you'll be playing in a decade's time



MicroMega

■ It created a whole range of cult Spectrum games, but just how much do you know about the 8-bit developer?



The Strike series

■ Shrouded in controversy on its release, find out how the *Strike* series became one of EA's most popular franchises



Julian Gollop

■ Discover how the master of strategy games has constantly evolved the genre over the last two decades

ENDGAME



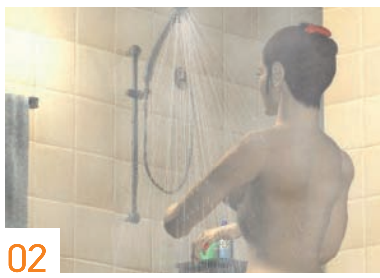
TEKKEN 2

» Nina Williams and her younger sister Anna have had a friendly rivalry that has existed since the very first Tekken. After becoming annoyed when she realised that she wouldn't be a playable character in the first arcade game in the series, Anna decided to get her own back on Nina by accusing her of stealing her shoes. Enraged by her sister's pettiness, Nina decides to get her revenge. The end result is one of videogaming's most sinister endings.



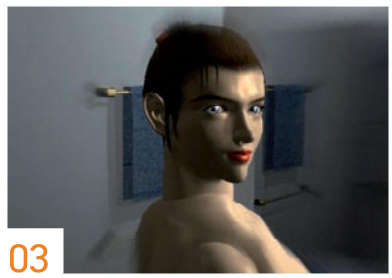
01

» We open on an empty room. It's Anna's apartment. The pair of red shoes that caused so much trouble are casually strewn on the floor, while Anna herself is taking a shower, blissfully unaware of what's about to happen to her…



02

» The camera moves in to show Anna, who, thankfully, is only using the shower head for washing. While set up to show her vulnerability, all it really does is demonstrate just how laughable CGI cut-scenes from the Nineties actually were.



03

» The camera moves in on a defenceless Anna, who is now drying herself off. At the very last moment she realises that somebody else is in the room with her and quickly turns around to confront her would-be assailant.



04

» There's a flash of light, but this is no re-enactment of Janet Leigh's grisly demise in *Psycho* – it's something even creepier. Nina has crept into her sister's room and taken a Polaroid of her while she's in the buff.



05

» Anna pleads with her sister to return the photo, but Nina is having none of it. "That'll teach you for calling me a thief," she says, before leaving to post the picture on Facebook. A seething Anna begins to plan her revenge for *Tekken 3*. To be continued?